



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 5, 2016

Florida Governor Declares States of Emergency Over Zika Virus

A state of emergency has been declared in four Florida counties — Miami-Dade, Hillsborough, Lee, and Santa Rosa — after nine people were diagnosed with the Zika virus. While the nine people are believed to have contracted the virus while out of the country, Florida's governor, Rick Scott, said he wants the state to be on high alert.

"Although Florida's current nine Zika cases were travel-related, we have to ensure Florida is prepared and stays ahead of the spread of the Zika virus in our state," Scott said in a statement on Thursday. "Our Department of Health will continue to be in constant communication with all county health offices, hospitals and the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)."



The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito (shown), which is the primary vector of the Zika virus, can be found in the state of Florida, prompting concerns that the virus may begin to spread from mosquito to person. ABC News reports that the *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes have also been identified as potential carriers, and can be found in virtually all of the eastern and middle regions of the United States.

Under Scott's executive order, the state health officer is required to "take any action necessary to protect public health," and also permits the commissioner of agriculture to issue a "mosquito declaration" in the counties in an effort to reduce the mosquito populations.

Florida has intensified its efforts to target mosquitoes. Hillsborough County is paying workers overtime to increase spraying. Officials in Pinellas County are planning to educate people about removing standing water where mosquitoes breed, and are also looking to expand the county's spraying program to target specifically the mosquitoes that carry Zika.

In Texas, which has eight cases of Zika, Fox News reports that no changes have been made to the mosquito control programs at this time, though Dallas reportedly has an aggressive program already in place. Health officials state that a person in Texas has become infected with the Zika virus through sex, marking the first case of the virus being transmitted within the United States.

While the Zika virus generally results in only mild symptoms for most people, with many never even realizing they have it, the recent outbreak has coincided with a stark rise in cases of microphaly, a potentially fatal condition in which babies develop abnormally small brains and skulls.

Punchng.com reports, "The outbreak has seen some countries urging couples not to get pregnant, while the U.S. Centers for Disease Control has warned pregnant women to avoid traveling to 22 affected nations, including Brazil, which has reported more than 4,000 cases of the virus since October 2015."



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Though it's been unconfirmed by the World Health Organization, Dr. Krishna Ella, head of Biotech International Limited, announced on Wednesday that a patent has been filed for the first Zika vaccine.

Earlier this week, the World Health Organization declared the Zika virus to be a public health emergency of international concern, marking only the fourth time the organization has made such a designation.

The outbreak of the Zika virus has compelled some health experts to call for lifting the ban on DDT. "That concern about DDT has to be reconsidered in the public health context," said Dr. Lyle R. Petersen, director of the division of vector-borne diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Likewise, Dr. Gilbert Ross, senior director of medicine and public health at the American Council on Science and Health states that DDT remains the only hope of keeping the Zika virus in check, as it will likely take at least a decade to find a vaccine for the virus and that the mosquito as well as the disease "will gain footholds in the U.S., as did the West Nile virus."

Dr. Ross wrote, "While DDT is not perfect (some resistance to the chemical may have emerged in the past), it may represent the best chance to hold this epidemic at least partly in check."

Unfortunately, Joe Conlon, technical adviser at the American Mosquito Control Association, believes it is not likely that DDT will be deployed.

"[DDT]'s got too much emotional baggage and environmental baggage associated with it," Conlon told FoxNews.com. "Anyone who would try to use it would be excoriated. We have other means to get rid of these mosquitoes."

Some health experts believe Washington and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are not taking the Zika threat seriously enough. "First of all, I think Zika will come to America, and actually I think it may be more important than the messaging we're getting out of Washington and [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]," Dr. Peter J. Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at the Baylor College of Medicine, told FoxNews.com. "I believe all of the conditions where they're present in Latin America and the Caribbean are also present in Texas and other Gulf Coast states," continued Hotez. "Which means we have time [to prepare] — and now's the time to do it," he said.

Others are criticizing the Department of Homeland Security's reaction to the virus. Though the DHS has guidelines in place to screen immigrants for communicable diseases, the Zika virus is particularly difficult to screen for because many carriers do not have any symptoms.

"That episode with Ebola should be a warning for the government, but I'm not seeing that," Jessica Vaughan, director of policy studies at the Center for Immigration Studies, told FoxNews.com. "I'm seeing the same things — 'nothing to worry about here, this is not going to affect us, we don't need to have any steps in place' — and that worries me."

"I find it remarkable that officials in [Zika-afflicted] countries would be recommending against having children because of the threat of this, and I think that should be an alarm for U.S. authorities to take this seriously," Vaughan said. "It's hard to say what the immigration implications of that would be, but I do think that one thing we know for sure is there's currently a very large flow of people from El Salvador [who are] coming illegally, and have been able to stay," she added.

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