

Sept. 12, 2016

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: FLORIDA PROVIDES ACCURATE AND TIMELY INFORMATION RELATED TO ZIKA



Contact:
Communications Office
NewsMedia@flhealth.gov
850-245-4111

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – On Saturday, September 10th, the *Miami Herald* published “Florida’s Zika undercount hides extent of virus’ spread, experts say,” a story suggesting that Florida is not being forthcoming regarding the burden of Zika in our state. This story is misleading and the claims made in it are **inaccurate**.

The Zika virus is new to the United States and the Florida Department of Health (DOH) is working daily with our partners and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to learn more about this virus and take every action to protect the public, especially expectant mothers. Since February, in an effort to keep Florida residents and visitors safe and aware about the status of the Zika virus, DOH has issued daily updates each weekday regarding the Zika virus, even prior to having local mosquito-borne transmission. **No other state is sharing information on the Zika virus with the public as frequently as Florida.**

CLAIM: “But the information issued by the governor and state agencies has not been timely or accurate — cases announced as “new” are often several weeks old, due to a time lag in diagnosis — and excludes details that public health experts say would allow people to make informed decisions and provide a complete picture of Zika’s foothold in Florida.”

FACTS:

- **The department is absolutely committed to transparency as our state continues to combat the Zika virus.**
- On a daily basis, our staff work with the public to provide up-to-date information on all of the agency’s Zika response, prevention and education efforts.
- As directed by Governor Scott, the department has operated a [Zika Virus Information Hotline](#) since February 12, 2016 to answer questions on the Zika virus and the state’s preparedness efforts. The number for the Zika Virus Information Hotline is 855-622-6735.
- DOH alerts the public to all cases of travel and non-travel related Zika in Florida residents when a case is confirmed through laboratory testing. Sometimes more than one test is required to differentiate between Zika and other mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue and chikungunya.
- Zika symptoms are mild, including fever, rash, joint pain and red eyes, and could be mistaken for a common virus or different mosquito borne illness like dengue or chikungunya.

When a person has Zika symptoms, health care providers must rule out other illnesses and confirm Zika virus through laboratory testing before the department can alert the public.

- Ruling out other modes of transmission is important for accuracy, and sometimes takes a week or two to reach individuals and verify facts. In some instances, consistent and thorough questioning has resulted in identifying a case as travel-related.
- For information on the department's investigation and testing process, please click [HERE](#).

CLAIM: "And under-reported the number of local Zika infections in Florida by excluding anyone who is not a state resident."

FACTS:

- **The Florida Department of Health follows guidelines set by CDC.**
- CDC guidelines state that a Zika case, **like ALL other reportable diseases**, is reported by state of residence, not by the location of where the virus was acquired. That is why the department did not include eight cases of non-Florida residents in our case counts, **per CDC reporting guidelines**.
- **Information on the number of out of state residents with Zika is available, however, the department, like the CDC, defers to the home state or country on whether they will announce the location of residency.** Texas, Taiwan and New York all shared publicly that they had residents who had acquired Zika in Florida, other jurisdictions have not yet shared this information. Governor Scott also announced this on August 19th.
- The out of state residents acquired Zika in an area where the department has already identified ongoing active transmission is occurring so the public is already aware of the risks associated with that area.
- Also, the department identifies **more** infections than is required by CDC. Florida is identifying and sharing information on **all** people who have laboratory evidence of Zika but do not have symptoms, whereas CDC cases of Zika are people who have laboratory evidence **and** symptoms.

CLAIM: "The health department has refused to say how many local infections involve pregnant women."

FACTS:

- Patient privacy is a priority of the department.
- The department strives to strike a balance between protecting patient privacy while providing the media and the public with information that is critical to protecting public health.
- Knowing the pregnancy status of locally transmitted cases is not necessary information to protect public health.

CLAIM: "The agency also has stopped issuing details of active investigations into local Zika cases. On Sept. 1, the health department began reporting only a summary of the total number

of investigations in each county. Previously, the agency had listed each investigation by county, with the number of people tested for Zika and the results of those tests.”

FACTS:

- The department has **not** stopped providing this information. Information on active investigations, such as the number of people tested, is available to any interested media or member of the public who would like the information and we provide this information to interested parties on a daily basis.
- We’ve adjusted and improved our communication vehicles over the past several months and will likely do so again to ensure we’re achieving our mission of sharing accurate and timely information.
- The department received feedback that the way information was presented on our website was difficult to understand, so we are re-working how the information is displayed in order to make it easier for the any member of the public to easily understand.

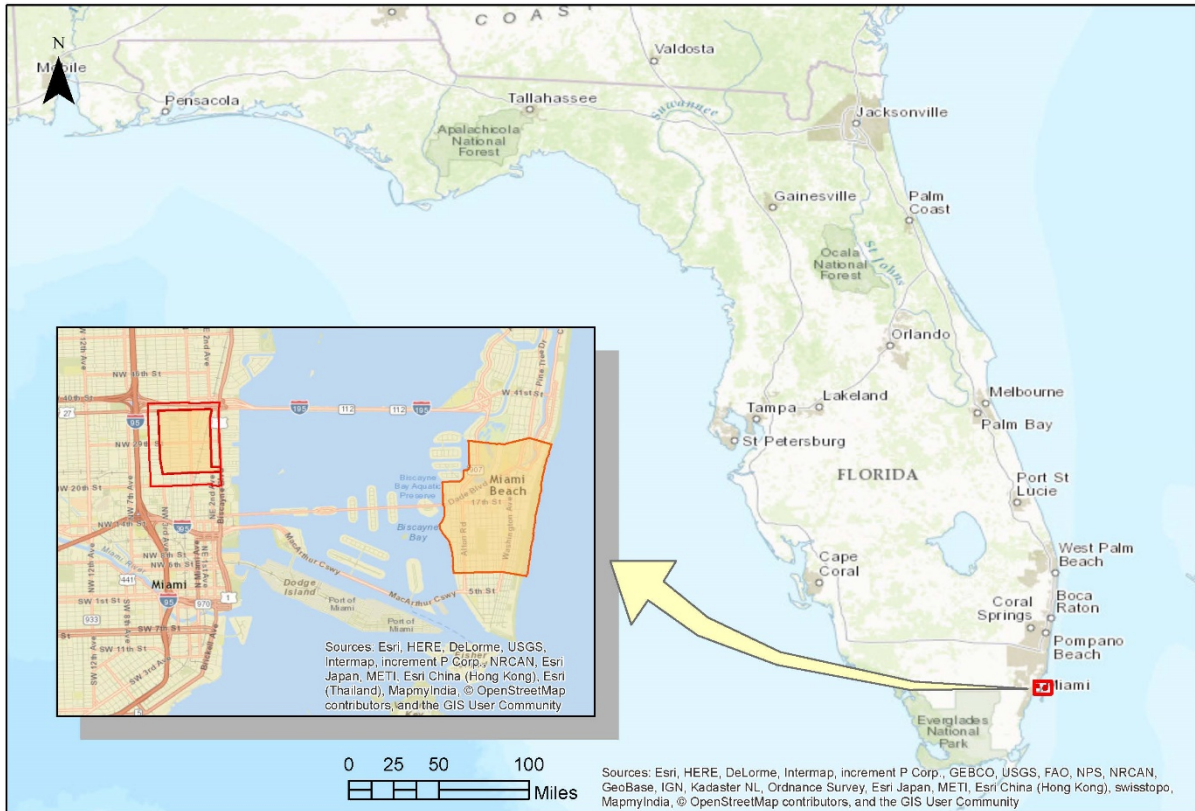
For a detailed timeline on Zika preparedness actions taken by Governor Rick Scott, please click [HERE](#).

For information on the department’s investigation and testing process, please click [HERE](#).

For more information on DOH action and federal guidance, please click [HERE](#).

For resources and information on Zika virus, click [HERE](#).

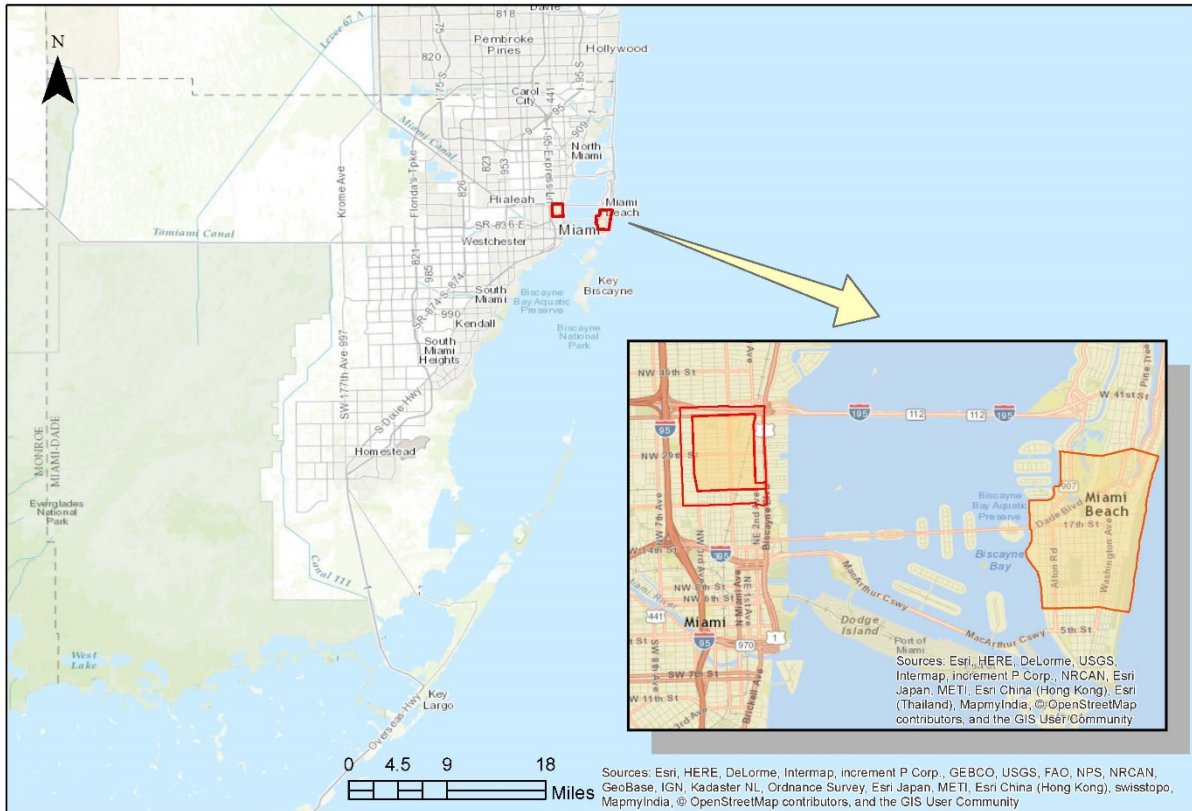
STATE OF FLORIDA



Areas of Active Local Zika Virus Transmission

Wynwood Area - NW 22nd St at the south; NE 2nd Ave to NE 23rd St. at the east; NW 3rd Ave to the West, and NE 36th street to the North
 Miami Beach Area - 28th Street to the north, 8th Street to the south, Intercoastal water to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY



Areas of Active Local Zika Virus Transmission

Wynwood Area - NW 22nd St. at the South, NE 2nd Ave to NE 23rd St. at the east; NW 3rd Ave to the west; and NE 36th St to the north
 Miami Beach Area - 28th Street to the north, 8th Street to the south, Intercoastal water to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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