Zika prevention kits available in York County

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Making sure pregnant women in Pennsylvania are protected against Zika is a top priority for Pennsylvania officials.

State Department of Health and Department of Environmental Protection officials came together Thursday to assemble 2,500 Zika prevention kits that will be distributed around the commonwealth.

"Zika has been connected to birth defects," said Dr. Karen Murphy, Department of Health secretary. "There are currently 40 confirmed cases in Pennsylvania, all of which have been acquired outside the state in areas where the disease is rapidly spreading."

Kits: Each kit contains EPA-approved insect repellent for use on skin; permethrin insect repellent for use on cloth, such as clothing and tents; standing water treatment tablets; and condoms.

"While Zika is spread primarily by mosquitoes that are infected with the virus, it also can spread through sexual contact with individuals who have the disease," Murphy said. “Because Zika poses serious health risks for babies born to women who contracted the virus during pregnancy, the kits include health-education materials and prevention tools to avoid mosquito bites and sexual transmission of the disease to pregnant women.

"Using the products in the Zika prevention kit can help protect you and your loved ones from the virus.”

The kits are available for free to pregnant women and can be found at health departments, federally qualified health centers, community health centers, WIC offices and other nonprofit organizations that serve women who are either low-income or homeless.
**Education:** Health care providers are trying to educate people, especially pregnant women and women in childbearing years, on the infection that can cause birth defects such as microcephaly — abnormally small heads with incomplete brain development — and possibly the autoimmune disease Guillain-Barré syndrome, which causes paralysis.

Kits are being distributed to organizations based on population, with the most distribution in the southern part of the state where the Asian tiger mosquito is found. The Asian tiger mosquito, or Aedes albopictus, has a farther reach north than is typical for the Aedes aegypti mosquito the virus has been found in.

“In partnership with the Department of Health, we advise all Pennsylvanians to take precautions to reduce and control mosquito populations in their area and to take appropriate actions to protect themselves from mosquito bites,” said Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Acting Secretary Patrick McDonnell. “DEP personnel and county partners are monitoring for the presence of mosquitoes that have the potential to transmit the Zika virus.”

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection acting Secretary Patrick McDonnell packs Zika prevention kits to be distributed around the commonwealth. (Katherine Ranzenberger photo) *(Photo: The York Dispatch)*

Concerns prompted Gov. Tom Wolf's administration to step up education work and monitor the situation.
“My administration is committed to ensuring the health and safety of all Pennsylvanians,” Wolf said in May when the program launched. “We are continuing to work with our partners on the local, state and federal levels to keep Pennsylvania safe. The roll-out of this plan is another proactive step in our collaborative strategy to protect our citizens and prevent the spread of the Zika virus.”

Where to find a kit: Three locations in York City will have kits available for pregnant women: Family First Health, 116 S. George St., has 50 available and WIC - Community Progress Council Inc., 226 E. College Ave., has 100 kits available. The York City Bureau of Health, 227 W. Market St., also will have the kits, but the exact number was not available.

Additional information on Zika virus can be found on the Department of Health’s website, [zika.pa.gov](http://www.yorkdispatch.com/story/news/2016/07/14/zika-prevention-kits-available-york-county/87077314/).