



**American Hospital
Association®**

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September 13, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
United States Capitol Building, S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
United States Senate
United States Capitol Building, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
United States Capitol Building, H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
United States Capitol Building, H-204
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Reid, Speaker Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi:

The American Hospital Association urges you to support funding for efforts to combat the Zika virus at the \$1.1 billion level with new funding. Action is urgent. As of Sept. 7, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 43 locally-acquired cases of Zika and 2,920 travel-related cases of Zika in the United States. Further, CDC reports that 671 pregnant women in the United States have been infected with Zika and that tragically to date, 17 children have been born with microcephaly due to Zika in the United States.

We are learning more week by week about just how dangerous Zika infection is during pregnancy. In addition to causing microcephaly, the virus causes other devastating birth defects that may not become visible for years after birth. Research is now linking Zika to health consequences in adults, such as Guillain-Barre Syndrome. Frighteningly, we may not know the full health consequences of the Zika virus for years to come.

Now that Zika is locally-transmitted in the United States, the challenge we face is preventing the virus from taking permanent hold, not only in Florida, but in half of the country. If Zika were to become endemic, it could result in devastating birth defects for countless American children and place immense burden on their families.

Time is not on our side. If local Zika transmissions continue, it will become increasingly difficult to eradicate the virus. We urge Congress to act now to prevent further transmission. With adequate funding, state and local public health departments would be able to respond with robust mosquito



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abatement programs, enhanced laboratory, epidemiology, and surveillance capacity and surge capacity through rapid response teams to limit transmission. Funding also would ensure that the development of a vaccine, diagnostic tests and treatments move forward as quickly as possible.

Preventing transmission of the Zika virus is a sound investment, both in terms of preventing human suffering and in economic costs to government health programs. Each infant with microcephaly is expected to require between \$1 million to \$10 million in care over a lifetime. There will be costs associated with other birth defects as well. In addition, local Zika transmission hurts American communities, especially those that thrive on tourism.

The United States has never before faced a public health threat that can be prevented like Zika. We urge you to quickly pass a package that provides funding at \$1.1 billion in new funds. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress to ensure the health of our communities. If you have any questions or would like to further discuss, Robyn Bash, vice president for government relations and public policy operations, is our point of contact. You can reach her at rbash@aha.org or (202) 626-2672.

Sincerely,

//s//

Thomas P. Nickels
Executive Vice President