

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representative  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

As Congress weighs further options to strengthen the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to include at least \$100 million in the next response package for the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Further, it is critical that Congress build on and sustain this capacity beyond the current crisis to ensure the United States retains a national program to quickly identify and respond to new threats to mothers and infants as they emerge.

The 2016 Zika virus supplemental spending bill (P.L. 114-223) provided resources to nearly every state to support a surveillance system to monitor the health of moms and babies, which set the foundation for the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program which was established to detect and respond to public health crises that threaten the health and wellbeing of pregnant and postpartum people, infants and young children. It was created to continuously monitor the short-term and long-term impacts and the needs of mothers and infants caused by emerging health threats and provide the infrastructure to quickly surge surveillance capacity during events like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Program data helps to support the monitoring and efforts to improve the health of pregnant women and infants and to link families to medical and social services to get recommended care. Program benefits also include strengthening laboratory and clinical testing to find emerging health threats quickly to targeted populations and contributing to efforts to ensure that public health systems are ready to meet the needs of pregnant women and infants during emergencies. During the Zika virus outbreak, the program helped local and state public health officials collect real-time data to help inform clinical guidance, identify communities with local transmission, and appropriately allocate scarce public health resources.

However, a failure to sustain federal funding since 2016 has diminished the program's scope. Whereas nearly all states participated then, today, the program collects data in only 13 states and jurisdictions on the impacts of infectious diseases and other health threats on pregnant women and their children through the first three years of life.

The need for greater investment program now is clear. There is currently limited information on the impact of COVID-19 on these populations. For pregnant and postpartum women, or for families with infants and young children, the short-term and long-term health implications of COVID-19 remain uncertain. If robustly funded, the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program would work to fill the knowledge gaps in clinical care using real-time data collection and help direct public health resources.

The few studies that are available regarding this population highlight the need for properly funding this program. A recent study published by the New England Journal of Medicine highlighted data from two New York City hospitals that implemented universal testing among pregnant women admitted for delivery. As a result, the hospitals found that roughly 88 percent of the pregnant patients who tested positive presented no symptoms of COVID-19<sup>[1]</sup>. Another early analysis of COVID-19 patients suggests that cases may be more severe in infants compared to older children and teenagers<sup>[2]</sup>.

Yet, there remains much we do not know. To date, CDC has not released sufficient recommendations specific to the care, evaluation, or management of COVID-19 for pregnant patients or infants. Investing in programs like the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program can help us get those answers.

By providing \$100 million for the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program, lawmakers will ensure local and state health departments across the country receive necessary resources to collect and analyze data on the impact of COVID-19 on pregnant and postpartum patients and their newborns, and quickly turn that data into guidance to inform the care of this at-risk population. By sustaining that funding in years to come, Congress can guarantee that this at-risk population is protected against future threats.

We thank you for your support of the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program and hope that you will work to ensure the inclusion of \$100 million in funding for this critical program in the next COVID-19 package.

Sincerely,

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2009316>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/some-children-develop-severe-infections-from-coronavirus-2020-3>