

August 3, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

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

On behalf of the millions of Americans we represent, we urge Congress in the strongest possible terms to craft a compromise Zika funding package that can pass both chambers and be signed by the President, and to be ready to act immediately on it upon Congress' return in September.

Zika virus presents a serious, imminent threat to pregnant women and infants across our nation. Recent studies have revealed that Zika is an even greater danger than we suspected. The virus can be transmitted not only by a simple mosquito bite, but also through sexual contact by either men or women. Zika may remain in bodily fluids for months; a recent study showed Zika persisting in semen for over 90 days. And while microcephaly is an obvious and severe outcome of Zika infection during pregnancy, we are just beginning to explore the spectrum of less visible but serious health consequences for infants, such as damage to the brain, vision, and hearing.

Fifteen cases of locally-transmitted cases of Zika have been identified in Florida. Over a dozen infants have been born in the U.S. with microcephaly. More than four hundred pregnant women in the states and over 400 more in the territories have been diagnosed with Zika and are being followed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It's possible that many people are infected and unaware of their status, since 80% of Zika cases cause no symptoms. The CDC has now recommended that every pregnant woman be assessed for Zika infection at every prenatal visit.

Congress must not allow Zika to spread unchecked. Our nation faces billions of dollars in medical costs just from screening pregnant women for Zika infection and its consequences. It is imperative that all parties return to the negotiating table immediately to craft a Zika funding package that can be passed by the House and Senate and signed into law by the President.

It may already be too late to stop Zika from gaining a foothold in some parts of the U.S., but we still have time to prevent more widespread transmission. Our nation expects Congress to come to a bipartisan compromise and be ready to act on it immediately in September. Anything less would represent a historic failure to protect our nation from a significant threat to the health of our children.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO
African American Health Alliance
AFSCME
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
American Association on Health and Disability
American College of Nurse-Midwives
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Network of Community Options and Resources
American Public Health Association
American Society for Reproductive Medicine
American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Big Cities Health Coalition
Coalition for Health Funding
Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc.
Cooley's Anemia Foundation
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Easterseals
Every Child by Two
Family Voices
GBS|CIDP Foundation International
Genetic Alliance
HIV Medicine Association
Infectious Diseases Society of America
March of Dimes
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Birth Defects Prevention Network
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Environmental Health Association
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Indian Health Board
National Organization for Rare Disorders
Newborn Foundation
OraSure Technologies
Public Health Institute
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition
RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
The Arc
Trust for America's Health