



## Zika Virus

The March of Dimes strongly supports proactive, aggressive efforts to slow the spread of Zika virus, which can cause severe birth defects among infants born to women infected while pregnant.

Zika virus is a member of the flavivirus family, which also includes yellow fever, chikungunya, and dengue fever. First identified in 1947, Zika infection usually causes mild, flu-like symptoms that get better on their own.

In 2015, however, health officials in South America identified a sharp increase in cases of microcephaly of babies born to women infected with Zika during pregnancy. Microcephaly is a serious birth defect in which infants are born with abnormally small heads and brain damage.

There is currently no treatment for Zika infection or for the microcephaly or the brain damage it causes. While work has already begun toward a vaccine, it is unlikely that a vaccine will be ready for use in large populations for at least two years, and possibly much longer.

### **Zika virus is likely to spread to the U.S. in 2016**

Zika virus has spread rapidly through South and Central America and the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico. Experts expect many cases of travel-related Zika infection in the U.S. throughout 2016, and have predicted that it is very possible the virus will become endemic across much of the U.S., meaning that it will be spread from person to person by mosquitoes.

### **Aggressive action can slow Zika's spread**

Federal, state and local officials are devising plans to educate the public, control mosquitoes, and accelerate research of vaccines and treatment. Additional funding is needed to allow this work to happen as quickly as possible to reduce the spread of Zika across the U.S. New resources should be provided immediately without raiding other vital public health priorities.

**The March of Dimes urges lawmakers to provide new funding immediately for the full range of efforts to slow or halt the spread of Zika virus across the United States.**

### Key Points

- Zika virus causes mild illness in most people, but can cause serious birth defects among babies born to women infected while pregnant.
- There is no treatment for Zika infection or the birth defects it causes.
- Zika virus has spread rapidly through South America, Central America, and the Caribbean. More than 20 countries now face Zika epidemics.
- The lifetime cost of treating a child with microcephaly is estimated to be more than \$10 million.
- While research is under way on a Zika vaccine, a vaccine is not expected to be ready for the general public for at least two years, and possibly much longer.
- Congress should act immediately to provide the resources needed to slow the spread of Zika virus across the U.S.

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