



North Carolina Chapter

North Carolina Pediatric Society

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The Honorable Thom Tillis
185 Dirksen Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tillis:

The **North Carolina Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics** urges you to take swift action and pass the strongest possible emergency funding to help prevent the spread of the Zika virus, and not at the expense of funding for other high priority public health programs.

As you know, the Zika virus has been confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to cause microcephaly, a serious birth defect of the brain, in babies of mothers who contracted the virus while pregnant. Infants with microcephaly are born with small heads, which often means the brain is small and underdeveloped. This birth defect has been linked to seizures, developmental delays and intellectual disabilities, as well as other lifelong health consequences.

With summer and mosquito season upon us, local transmission of the virus will likely occur, placing more pregnant women at risk of acquiring Zika and passing it on to their babies. North Carolina is currently home to many types of mosquitos – and, as you know, a great place to spend time outdoors.

Although we are continuing to learn more about Zika every day, one thing is clear: the time to act is now. It has been four months since President Barack Obama first requested emergency spending from Congress to help combat the spread of the Zika virus – we cannot afford any further delay.

A robust emergency spending package can help educate the public about how to protect themselves from Zika, expand vector and mosquito control to reduce the mosquito population, and accelerate research to speed up Zika vaccine development, as well as to learn better how the virus works. Moreover, supplemental funding will assist the CDC and USAID in efforts to contain the Zika virus and ensure that there are resources for surveillance, vector control and services for affected pregnant women and children.

If we take immediate action, we may be able to dramatically slow the spread of Zika, giving scientists time to develop and test a vaccine. Without action, however, we risk allowing permanent birth defects to affect our nation's newborns. In addition to the human toll on children and families, the CDC estimates that the average lifetime cost of caring for each child born with microcephaly could exceed \$10 million *per child*. For hard-hit communities, an epidemic of severe birth defects could quickly overwhelm health care and social services systems, and put extreme pressure on educational and other institutions.

As pediatricians, we do everything in our power to protect children and families; ensuring they are safe from the Zika virus is a critical way to protect their health, and we can't do it alone. Our nation has a brief window of opportunity to hold back the virus and avert a wave of preventable birth defects. The **North Carolina Chapter of the AAP** urges Congress to pass a strong emergency supplemental funding package without delay to protect pregnant women and infants from this devastating infection.

Sincerely,

Deborah Ainsworth, MD, FAAP
Chapter President
NC Pediatric Society, Inc