

PRESS STATEMENT AND MEDIA AVAILABILITY

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ASTMH: \$1.1 Billion Approved to Fight Zika Virus Will Unlock the Door for Research

Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. (September 30, 2016)— The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH), with a membership of the world’s leading tropical medicine experts, said the long-awaited move in Congress to approve \$1.1 billion in federal funding to curtail the spread and effects of Zika virus will unlock the door for urgently needed scientific research.

“This money will help us to better understand the Zika virus and its associated health conditions, and to develop new diagnostics, vaccines, or other treatments to combat it,” said **Stephen Higgs, PhD, President of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH), and Director of Kansas State University’s Biosecurity Research Institute**. “We have had researchers desperate to get to work developing these tools to protect us especially the most vulnerable – pregnant women and their children – from this disease but they have been hamstrung by the lack of funding. This situation underscores the reality that the United States must take a more proactive and efficient approach to anticipate and be better prepared for the next outbreak, whatever that might be. Disease doesn’t hit the pause button and wait for funding. ASTMH is eager to work with Congress and the Administration and find a solution based on lessons learned.”

Despite strong support from the scientific and medical community, the funding approval came after a seven-month partisan battle in Congress. During this period of time, the mosquito-borne virus has been actively spreading in South and Central America, the Caribbean, and into the southern United States. Zika virus can cause birth defects if contracted by pregnant women and Guillain-Barré syndrome—a temporary paralysis that can prove deadly. The World Health Organization declared the Zika outbreak a Public Health Emergency in May and the number of cases has steadily increased to more than 3,600 in the United States including almost 100 locally transmitted cases, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov).

Last month, twenty-six current and past ASTMH presidents sent a [letter](#) to the leadership of the US Senate and House of Representatives urging policymakers to pass an emergency spending bill to combat the Zika virus as soon as possible voicing mounting concerns of dwindling federal funding delaying vaccine research and development.

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About the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene

The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, founded in 1903, is the largest international scientific organization of experts dedicated to reducing the worldwide burden of tropical infectious diseases and improving global health. It accomplishes this through generating and sharing scientific evidence, informing health policies and practices, fostering career development, recognizing excellence, and advocating for investment in tropical medicine/global health research. For more information, visit astmh.org.