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NACCHO URGES CONGRESS TO SPEND \$1.8B FOR ZIKA VIRUS DISEASE

Washington, DC, February 23, 2016—Citing a critical need to combat Zika virus disease, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) has urged Congress to provide \$1.8 billion in emergency funding as requested by President Barack Obama. In its February 16 letter to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, NACCHO wrote in support of sustained federal funding for public health programs to prepare for and respond to the Zika virus. Local health officials believe that emerging infectious disease threats, including Zika virus disease, require ongoing vigilance, but the particular risks from this virus require immediate, additional investments.

NACCHO Executive Director LaMar Hasbrouck, MD, MPH, said, “It is absolutely critical that new funding is made available to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local health departments to be prepared for what will surely be an increased number of Zika virus disease cases in the future, perhaps as early as this spring. Since local health departments are on the front lines of community preparation and response, funding is needed for public education, mosquito eradication, investigation and vector control, refinement of diagnostics and vaccines, and expanded capacity to test people suspected of having contracted the disease.”

Currently, there are now 82 confirmed cases of travel-associated Zika virus disease in the U.S., and the urgency to act is clear. Although not a new virus, 2015 marked the first widespread transmission of the Zika virus in the Americas. The virus is spread primarily by mosquitoes and usually causes only mild illness or no symptoms, but it may be causing a steep increase in birth defects, including microcephaly (a congenital neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by abnormal smallness of the head) in infants born to mothers who were infected during pregnancy. Coinciding with the Zika cases has been a rise in the number of cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), a debilitating disorder in which the body's immune system attacks part of the peripheral nervous system. The link to Zika virus disease is unclear, but the current outbreak in Colombia, South America is raising concerns that are challenging doctors to discover if Zika is causing GBS, or whether it is reacting with antibodies from other widespread mosquito-borne viruses, including dengue or chikungunya.

Given limited investments in public health infrastructure, such surge funding for emergent threats like Zika is necessary. NACCHO also cited the need for Congress to sufficiently fund the core infectious disease program at CDC to help avert these situations in the future. This program includes the vector-borne diseases program that provides resources to state and local health departments to detect, control, and prevent bacteria and viruses transmitted by mosquitoes.

ABOUT NACCHO

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is the national non-profit association representing the approximately 2,800 local health departments (LHDs) in the United States, including city, county, metro, district, and tribal agencies. NACCHO's vision is health, equity, and security for all people in their communities through public health policies and services. NACCHO's mission is to be a leader, partner, catalyst, and voice for local health departments in order to ensure the conditions that promote health and equity, combat disease, and improve the quality and length of all lives.

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