

This country is on the verge of a major public health crisis—caused by mosquito-borne Zika virus. Unlike West Nile virus, which requires a female mosquito to bite a bird and then a person to transmit the disease to a 2nd person, Zika is transmitted from human to human by mosquitoes. Zika is sexually transmitted, and it's transmitted by an infected pregnant woman to her fetus, causing microcephaly, a major and very serious birth defect. It's also transmitted via blood donations. The virus targets the nervous system, and has been shown to cause major brain and other neurological problems—vision, hearing, etc. in unborn fetuses. The entire spectrum of problems is not known yet. Just caring for these very sick infants will cost millions of dollars each.

Zika can also cause serious neurological problems in adults, including paralysis. Preventing the spread of Zika virus should be on top of everyone's list of important issues for funding. There's no vaccine against this virus, and the only way to prevent its' spread at present is via mosquito control.

Zika is already epidemic in Puerto Rico (nearly 1000 cases), and of the 544 travel-associated cases reported to date in the continental US, 16 have been reported in Illinois. *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, common in our southern states, are the most frequent carriers of Zika. In a paper published in the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* last year, entomologists confirmed a group of *Aedes aegypti* living a few blocks from the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

It's imperative that we put enough money into the mosquito control program NOW that Zika doesn't become endemic in the continental US.