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GOV. SCOTT'S "FIGHTING FOR FLORIDA'S FUTURE" BUDGET MAKES KEY INVESTMENTS IN ZIKA PREPAREDNESS



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TALLAHASSEE, Fla.— Governor Rick Scott's "Fighting for Florida's Future" Budget invests \$2.9 billion to protect the health and well-being of Florida families and visitors. The "Fighting for Florida's Future" Budget focuses on enhancing epidemiological resources, boosting existing programs focused on children and continued technological improvements. With these investments, Florida can continue to prepare for all expected and unexpected potential public health threats like Zika.

Governor Rick Scott said "The health and safety of Florida families and visitors has always been a top priority in our state. Last year, we learned a lot from combatting the Zika virus and as a father and grandfather, I have been fully committed to doing everything possible to protect pregnant women and their developing babies who are most at risk from a Zika infection. The 'Fighting for Florida's Future' budget makes important investments in public health to ensure our state has the resources needed to continue fighting Zika, and other potential public health emergencies, in the months and years ahead."

Florida State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health Dr. Celeste Philip said, "As we've learned from our Zika response, as well as Ebola and MERS in the past few years, we must continue to be prepared to respond to new public health threats in a timely and effective manner. We've repeatedly had to depend heavily on the skills of epidemiologists, and it is crucial to have a strong epidemiology workforce, particularly at the local level."

Recommended Funding Highlights:

\$1.9 million for Epidemiology, Surveillance and Outbreak Control Enhancements

This funding will provide for 21 epidemiologists dedicated to serve our 67 county health departments. Epidemiologists were key in all Zika investigations and Ebola monitoring. It is important that the department has individuals at the local level who have the skills to perform epidemiological analyses as well as manage the large volume of day-to-day reportable diseases, outbreaks and emerging diseases.

Dr. Karen Harris, Chair of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists District 12 said, "For the first time, this year we battled a mosquito-borne illness that had grave impacts on developing babies. It was a difficult time for health care providers and families as we were quickly trying to learn as much about Zika as we could. I worked closely with Dr. Philip and the Florida Department of Health to keep our OB/GYN community up to speed on the developments. The department's epidemiological staff were key in the research and guidance

that shaped our responses. I applaud Governor Scott and Surgeon General Philip for recognizing the importance of these scientists and working to enhance the existing team.”

\$2.2 Million for Infectious Diseases Research Program

This funding will establish a new recurring source of \$2.2 million to enhance Florida’s competitiveness for more than \$5 billion in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that is directed toward infectious diseases research. This recommendation will also enhance the State’s preparedness in responding to future outbreaks like Zika. This is a peer review grant process similar to cancer research programs.

Dr. Michael Lauzardo, Chief of the Division of Infectious Diseases and Global Medicine at the University of Florida said, “Emerging public health threats like Zika highlight the need for greater investment in infectious disease research that will help us better protect the health of individuals and communities. Florida is already a national leader in cutting edge research and with the Governor’s investment, we can help prevent and address infectious disease emergencies locally and globally.”

\$1.2 million for the Dental Sealant Program

Currently, 51 Department of Health County Health Departments provide School-Based Sealant Program services. This funding will expand this program to the remaining counties statewide. This program helps ensure low-income children have access to quality dental care. Every \$1 invested in preventative dental sealants saves \$1.88 in costs related to treating decaying teeth.

Dr. Bill D’Aiuto, President of the Board of Trustees for the Florida Dental Association said, “Tooth decay is the single most common chronic condition affecting children in the United States and it can negatively impact a child’s health and school performance. The Governor’s investment in expanding the Florida Department of Health’s School-Based Dental Sealant Program to cover all 67 counties in Florida will help ensure more children in our state have access to effective dental care so they can lead healthy lives and do well in school.”

For additional details on the Governor’s budget, visit www.fightingforfloridasfuturebudget.com.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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