

WHO launches \$56 million Zika response plan

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The World Health Organization on Wednesday released its initial response plan to the Zika virus outbreak, launching a funding appeal for the \$56 million (50 million euros) operation.

The unprecedented outbreak of the virus, first discovered in Uganda in 1947, has become a global concern, with Zika now strongly suspected of causing two serious neurological disorders, microcephaly and Guillain-Barre syndrome.

The UN's health agency said it needed \$25 million to fund its own response plan, while an additional \$31 million would support the work of key partners.

"The strategy focuses on mobilising and coordinating partners, experts and resources to help countries enhance surveillance of the Zika virus and disorders that could be linked to it," a WHO statement said.

Other priorities are to control the populations of the mosquito species that carries Zika, as well as "communicate risks, guidance and protection measures, provide medical care to those affected and fast-track research and development of vaccines," testing and treatment, the statement added.

The outbreak has predominantly affected the Americas, with Brazil the hardest-hit country by far.

While Zika itself typically involves mild, flu-like symptoms, global anxiety has been driven by the likely link to likely link to microcephaly—which can cause severe birth malformations and defects—and Guillan-Barre, which can cause brain damage and even death.

WHO said it was it was financing its initial operations from an "emergency contingency fund".

The UN agency on February 1 declared the surge in cases of microcephaly and Guillain-Barre and their possible link to Zika an international public health emergency.

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