

## \$122 million needed to fight Zika over 18 months: WHO

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The World Health Organization said Friday that \$122 million (108 million euros) is needed to fund an 18-month anti-Zika battle plan that will focus on women of child-bearing age.

The mosquito-borne virus has recently been linked to serious [birth defects](#) including shrunken heads in newborns and neurological disorders having previously been thought to cause just flu-like symptoms.

The ongoing outbreak has affected more than 60 countries. Brazil remains the hardest-hit country, with Rio de Janeiro set to host the Olympics in less than two months.

WHO director general Margaret Chan said that the organisation's new Zika Strategic Response Plan reflects the rapidly growing amount of new information available about the virus.

"The [response](#) now requires a unique and integrated strategy that places support for [women](#) and girls of child-bearing age at its core," Chan said in a statement.

Funding needs have risen significantly since the first \$56 million plan was announced in February, when only 23 countries and health organisations needed Zika-related support, Chan said.

Since then the virus has spread while near conclusive evidence has emerged linking it to the congenital defect microcephaly—an

abnormally small head—and neurological problems such as Guillain-Barre Syndrome, which can cause paralysis and death.

Priorities for the new response include contingency planning in case Zika spreads further as well as sexual and reproductive counselling for people who may want to delay pregnancy.

WHO has urged pregnant women to avoid travel to Zika-affected areas.

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