

Europe creates Zika drug 'task force'

February 8 2016

Europe's medicines watchdog said Monday it had assembled an expert team to aid the development of drugs and vaccines against Zika virus, feared to cause brain damage in unborn babies.

The task force includes specialists in [vaccine design](#) and infectious diseases, the London-based European Medicines Agency (EMA) announced in a statement, and warned of a "widening public health crisis".

"This group will be available to give advice on any scientific and regulatory matters for the research and development of medicines or vaccines against the virus," it said.

An outbreak of the usually benign Zika virus in Latin America and the Caribbean has coincided with a surge in babies with microcephaly, a condition that causes them to have unusually small heads and brains, leading to death or disability.

No scientific proof has been found that Zika causes microcephaly, though the UN's World Health Organization (WHO) has said a link is "strongly suspected" and has declared Zika a "[public health emergency](#) of international concern."

There is no cure or vaccine for the virus which, in most people, causes mild symptoms.

The EMA urged drug developers to contact its experts with any

"promising projects" related to Zika.

"EMA will also proactively reach out to companies already planning to work on investigational vaccines and offer scientific and regulatory advice," the statement said.

The WHO has created a global response unit on Zika.

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Citation: Europe creates Zika drug 'task force' (2016, February 8) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-02-europe-zika-drug-task.html>

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