

Barack Obama seeks USD 1.8 billion emergency funding to fight Zika virus

09/02/2016 21:47 by admin

Washington: US President Barack Obama on Monday sought more than USD 1.8 billion in emergency funding to fight the fast-spreading Zika virus, the mosquito-borne illness that may be causing a rare birth defect in Latin American nations.

The White House said the Obama administration is taking appropriate measure to protect Americans and is seeking the fund to expand mosquito control programmes, speed development of a vaccine, and boost support for low-income pregnant women.

It said it is asking the Congress for more than USD 1.8 billion in emergency funding to enhance ongoing efforts to respond to the Zika virus domestically and internationally.

Obama is scheduled to send his annual budgetary proposals to Congress tomorrow.

The Obama administration has been working to combat Zika -- a virus primarily spread by mosquitoes and linked to birth defects and other health outcomes. It is believed the virus is passed from infected pregnant women to their unborn children.

The federal government has been monitoring the Zika virus and working with domestic and international health partners to alert healthcare providers and the public about the virus.

It is also working to provide public health laboratories with diagnostic tests and detect and report cases both domestically and internationally, the White House said.

The mosquito-borne illness has surged across Latin America, prompting fears that spring weather could bring an explosion in cases. There is no vaccine for the virus which, in most people, causes mild symptoms.

While there has not been transmission of Zika virus by mosquitoes within the continental United States, Puerto Rico and other US territories in warmer areas with *Aedes aegypti* mosquito populations are already seeing active transmission.

In addition, some Americans have returned to the continental US from affected countries in South America, Central America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands with Zika infections.

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention have reported 50 laboratory-confirmed cases among US travellers from December 2015-February 5 this year.

The White House said: "As spring and summer approach, bringing with them larger and more active mosquito populations, we must be fully prepared to mitigate and quickly address local transmission within the continental US, particularly in the southern United States."

According to the White House, the emergency will also be used to enable the testing and procurement of vaccines and diagnostics; improving epidemiology and expanding laboratory and diagnostic testing capacity; improving health services and supports for low-income pregnant women, and enhancing the ability of Zika-affected countries to better combat mosquitoes and control transmission.

- PTI