

**Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper**  
**“Preparing for and Protecting the Nation from Zika”**

**Wednesday, June 29, 2016**

*As prepared for delivery:*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this roundtable today to discuss current efforts to combat the Zika virus. With the official start of summer last week, we are now in the midst of mosquito season in most parts of the United States. Unfortunately, at a time when families should be welcoming the warmer weather and traditional outdoor activities, according to media reports many are instead finding themselves having to reconsider vacations—or even whether to enjoy the great outdoors or start a family—in light of this threat.

As we all know by now, the virus has spread explosively throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean. It has already reached Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories, infecting more than 1,800 people in Puerto Rico to date. Meanwhile, more than 800 travel-related Zika cases have already been diagnosed within the continental United States, including more than 250 pregnant women. My own home state of Delaware has reported five cases of Zika so far. With the confirmation that Zika is a cause of several severe birth defects, this virus is particularly frightening to those looking to start—or grow—a family.

As the mosquito primarily responsible for transmitting the virus can be found in many states, and will be present in large numbers well into the fall, we must be prepared for the possibility of major Zika outbreaks here at home. It’s been encouraging, then, to see a proactive, coordinated response from federal, state, local, and private sector partners. Just like with our response to Ebola, our response to Zika must be an all-hands-on-deck effort.

As we will discuss today, there are significant mosquito control efforts underway across the country. Officials are also working to develop and distribute the necessary equipment to test people for the virus. Resources are also being put toward vaccine development. Just last week, one potential Zika vaccine was approved for initial safety testing – a promising sign. Efforts to educate the public about the virus and strategies to prevent infection—such as the use of mosquito repellent—are just as important.

Going forward, we must act swiftly to ensure that we have the tools needed to protect us from Zika. However, such aid should not come at the expense of ongoing efforts to contain other dangerous diseases such as Ebola and avian influenza. And, I believe it would be a mistake to pilfer the Affordable Care Act to combat this public health emergency. Congress and the Obama administration, along with state and local governments have a responsibility to the American people to work together to fully combat the health risks posed by Zika. I look forward to working with my colleagues on a responsible, bipartisan solution that combats the Zika virus without creating other health and funding crises down the road.

With that, I thank the participants here with us today and look forward to a constructive discussion about what steps we can take to prepare for, prevent and respond to Zika.