

FSU included in Gov. Scott's \$25 million grants package for Zika research

Byron Dobson, Democrat senior writer Published 11:26 a.m. ET Feb. 2, 2017 | Updated 8:41 p.m. ET Feb. 2, 2017

Researchers at FSU have made breakthroughs in Zika research



(Photo: Michele Edmunds)

Florida State University will receive \$2.2 million of the \$25 million earmarked by Gov. Rick Scott to conduct Zika research.

Scott's office announced Wednesday that 34 grants have been awarded from the \$25 million in state money authorized for Zika research and vaccine development.

"While we are currently in winter months when Zika is not as prevalent, we must remain vigilant and continue to do everything we can to help protect pregnant women and their developing babies," Scott said.

The Florida Department of Health says more than 1,000 people in Florida were diagnosed with travel-related Zika cases in 2016.

The grants will assist university research to speed up the development of a vaccine to prevent Zika infection; to study and mitigate long-term impacts of Zika virus on children and adults and develop cost-effective Zika

testing methods, Scott said.

Florida State's grant will be divided among three projects, according to the university:

Assistant Vice President for Research Eric Holmes and Vice President for Research Gary K. Ostrander will receive \$1.1 million for human clinical trials involving the drug niclosamide. The drug is currently on the market for tapeworm infections, but researchers found in lab studies that it can also be effective in combating the Zika virus.

Associate Professor of Biomedical Sciences Timothy Megraw will receive \$856,750 to understand the mechanisms by which the Zika virus activates the microtubule-organizing activity in the centrosome and to identify drugs that interfere with this process, blocking the spread of the virus.

Assistant Professor of Biomedical Sciences David Meckes will receive \$199,280 to identify markers in the mother that lets doctors know that the fetus has been infected with the Zika virus. Meckes' lab is working with scientists and physicians in Puerto Rico to obtain samples from pregnant women who have either tested positive or negative for the Zika virus.



Ross Ellington, associate vice president for research at Florida State University. (Photo: Michele Edmunds)

"We are pleased with the Department of Health's faith in Florida State as a partner to combat the effects of the Zika virus," said Associate Vice President for Research Ross Ellington. "The research conducted by our faculty will help move the needle as scientists and doctors work to find a cure for this devastating disease."

The Florida Department of Health oversaw the grant applications, which were awarded based on recommendations by the Biomedical Research Advisory Council. Researchers at any university or research institute in Florida were eligible to apply.

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Infobox:

The following universities and organizations received grant funding:

University of Miami – \$13,170,784

University of Florida - \$2,922,999

University of South Florida - \$2,458,995

Florida International University - \$2,183,004

Florida State University - \$2,169,675

University of Central Florida - \$1,297,817

Nova Southeastern University - \$198,886

Florida Atlantic University - \$199,280

Moffitt Cancer Center - \$199,280

The Scripps Research Institute - \$199,280

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