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NEWS RELEASE

JUDGE EMMETT LAUDS STATE HEALTH OFFICIALS FOR ADDRESSING PROBLEMS IN ZIKA PREVENTION

*Emmett Had Criticized Mosquito Repellent Giveaway
As Overly Cumbersome, Unrealistic*

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett thanked state health officials today for their efforts to make Zika-combatting mosquito repellent widely available to low-income women of child-bearing age by eliminating requirements he criticized last week as inefficient and "almost dysfunctional."

State Health and Human Services Commission officials announced this week that they had agreed on a standing order that allows pharmacies and others to dispense two cans of free mosquito repellent per month to eligible women ages 10-45 and those who are pregnant.

HHSC officials had initially said that federal rules would require eligible recipients to obtain a medical prescription for the free repellent, even though such repellents are available for purchase without a prescription. That prompted Emmett, a member of the state's Task Force on Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response, to respond that such a system would likely discourage, rather than encourage, participation.

"If you tell people, well, if you call your doctor and get a prescription - you know, a lot of the target audience, they're not going to hear that message," Emmett said last week. "Frankly, I would rather . . . just figure out a way to give away mosquito repellent and be done with it."

State health officials announced today that they had done just that, by having a doctor write a "standing order" that would serve as a prescription for repellent for the entire state.

"Zika preparedness and prevention is one of our top health concerns in Harris County and throughout Texas," Emmett said today. "I applaud our state officials for finding a common-sense approach to comply with the often cumbersome federal rules they face. Anything we can do to encourage prevention is welcome, and this is a perfect example of a sensible approach to a participation problem."