

Call to Action: Dengue

(24 March 2009)

Dr. Mirta Roses Periago today called on all countries of the Americas to increase their efforts and work together to fight the increasing and widespread number of dengue cases that have been reported in almost every country of the Americas this year.

Current and serious dengue outbreaks in Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and the cases in the Southern Cone constitute an alert for the entire Region, according to the Pan American Health Organization.

Background: Dengue is an infectious disease produced by four types of dengue virus. The disease can manifest with no symptoms, to developing classical Dengue, with flu-like symptoms, fever, joint pain and nausea and progress up to the most serious forms that include Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever and Dengue Shock Syndrome and death. There is no vaccine and no medicine to prevent dengue. Dengue's spread is due in part to informal settlements, the lack of sewer systems and running water, and an overall increase in the poor quality of the physical environment, crowded urban and suburban dwellings and lack of universal access to basic health services.

Talking Points

- Dengue has been reported in almost every country in the Americas. In 2008, there were more than 850,000 reported cases of dengue, including more than 38,000 cases of dengue hemorrhagic fever, causing 584 deaths.
- For 2009, almost 114,000 cases of dengue have been reported, with more than 2,000 cases of dengue hemorrhagic fever and dengue with complications and 42 deaths.
- Countries should increase the preventive measures and resources needed to respond to this problem, as 2009 may follow past trends in the Region, where severe dengue outbreaks have been reported every 3 to 5 years.
- Governments need to strengthen surveillance, control mosquito breeding sites and clinical management of the patient, and the first priority is to avoid deaths.
- Public awareness with community participation and civil society/grassroots organizations plays an important role in cleaning up any stagnant water, such as tires, vases, and standing water in other areas where mosquitoes can breed. This includes inside house as well as their surroundings.
- Personal protection is also needed, and people—particularly small children—are urged to use repellents and avoid exposure to mosquitoes.
- People should not self-medicate. Severe forms and death can be avoided with early medical treatment and by seeking care from a medical/health worker immediately.
- Dengue is not only a health sector responsibility; it requires an integrated and multidisciplinary approach, one that includes the municipalities and strong support from the mass media, with clear and precise prevention and education. Health services must guarantee timely treatment. The community, church groups, and associations should come together to clean neighborhoods of receptacles that can hold water and mosquitoes and to share information on prevention.

PAHO/WHO continues to provide technical cooperation in dengue prevention and response to outbreaks for all the countries in the Region through a group of experts, mainly in the areas of epidemiological surveillance in accordance with the International Health Regulations (IHR), vector control, clinical management of patients, and risk communication.

For more information, see:

http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=509&Itemid=235

<http://www.paho.org/English/ad/dpc/cd/dengue.htm>

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