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Dengue raises alarm in Central America

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Authorities have issued dengue alerts in four nations across Central America, where alarm is rising as the mosquito-borne disease has infected 30,000 people and killed 17 this year alone.

Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and El Salvador have issued formal alerts. In Guatemala and Panama, officials say they are monitoring the disease, which normally spreads more easily later in the rainy season.

"It is great that they are coming around to fumigate; mosquitoes seem like no big deal but they really can kill you," said Mauricio Gonzalez, a mechanic in the Nueva Esperanza district south of Tegucigalpa.

So far this year, Honduras has had 10 deaths, 8,380 cases of ordinary dengue and 1,219 cases of dengue hemorrhagic fever.

In Honduras alone, the 2010 epidemic killed 83 people.

Health authorities said they have been baffled by this recent outbreak, which has occurred despite a spate of unusually dry weather. The mosquitoes that carry dengue usually proliferate in times of heavy rain.

Dengue affects between 50 and 100 million people in the tropics and subtropics each year, resulting in fever, muscle and joint ache.

The disease is caused by four strains of virus that are spread by the mosquito Aedes aegypti.

There is no vaccine, so medical authorities in the region, where poverty is widespread, have been trying to stamp it out by focusing on mosquito control.

The illness can be fatal, developing into hemorrhagic fever, which can lead to shock and internal bleeding.

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