

# Virus outbreak causes 40 child deaths in China

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(AP) -- A top Chinese leader called for stepped-up research into vaccines and drugs for hand, foot and mouth disease after 40 children died from outbreaks last month, a state news agency said Saturday.

The Ministry of Health reported 77,756 cases of the disease in March. The number of deaths increased sharply, up from 10 in February.

"Preventing and controlling various [infectious diseases](#) such as the hand-foot-mouth disease is a key task," Xinhua News Agency quoted Vice Premier Li Keqiang as saying.

China sees deadly outbreaks of hand, foot and mouth disease every spring and summer, particularly in rural areas where hygiene is poor. There were 353 deaths from the disease in 2009, according to Health Ministry figures.

Li called for more research into vaccines and drugs to fight the disease, plus stronger prevention and control efforts, Xinhua said. Outbreaks were reported in southern China's Guangxi Autonomous Region as well as Guangdong, Henan, Hebei and Shandong provinces.

Currently, there is no vaccine or specific treatment for the virus, but most children recover quickly without problems.

Hand, foot and mouth disease typically strikes infants and children and is characterized by fever, mouth sores and a rash with blisters. It is spread

by direct contact with nose and throat discharges, saliva, fluid from blisters, or the stool of infected people.

The virus is unrelated to the [foot and mouth disease](#) that affects livestock.

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