

Jamaica steps up efforts to combat dengue fever

October 11 2012, by David Mcfadden

(AP)—Jamaica is stepping up mosquito eradication across the island and urging school children to stamp out breeding grounds to combat an epidemic of dengue fever, the Caribbean country's health minister said Thursday.

[Health Minister](#) Fenton Ferguson told reporters there have been five suspected deaths from the mosquito-borne virus in Jamaica so far this year. Only one has been confirmed with an autopsy.

There have been more than 1,200 suspected cases as of Sept. 29, compared to 887 during the same period last year. About half the cases have occurred in the southern capital of Kingston. However, this year's cases are far less than in 2010, an outbreak year.

Officials have dispatched fumigation trucks to spray roughly 450 neighborhoods and teams are clearing [storm drains](#) that are clogged with debris. Thousands of premises have been inspected, Fenton said.

"We have been taking the necessary steps to reduce the mosquito population and limit the impact of the epidemic across the island," he said at the ministry's offices.

But since fumigation alone can't stop the insects, authorities have urged islanders to do their part in containing the population, such as sure *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes are not breeding in water standing in garbage and old tires.

The Jamaican government is trying to enlist energetic youngsters in the campaign by distributing 400,000 brochures in schools that show how [mosquito larvae](#) flourish in stagnant water.

Similar battles are being fought in other parts of the region, including the Dominican Republic and the U.S. island of Puerto Rico, where earlier this week the health department declared an epidemic after nearly 5,000 cases and at least six deaths were reported for 2012.

Dengue victims suffer symptoms like headaches, cramps and severe joint and [muscle pain](#). Most recover after a week, but a severe hemorrhagic form can be fatal. There is no vaccination or cure for dengue, which is also known as "break-bone fever" because of the pain it causes.

Fenton warned that Jamaica's problem could worsen as the rainy season advances. Dengue [cases](#) usually flare up from August through December.

"We expect that in the coming weeks there may be even more adult [mosquitoes](#) given the recent rains," Fenton said.

The tropical virus was once thought to have been nearly eliminated from the region, but it has steadily gained strength in Latin America and the Caribbean since the early 1980s.

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