

Panama to use transgenic mosquitoes in anti-dengue bid

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Police stand guard at the residence of Panama's former dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega, as it is demolished on January 9, 2014 following a decision by the Health Ministry which considers it a breeding site of the Aedes mosquito that transmits dengue

Panama will try to control a dengue outbreak that has claimed six lives this year by releasing transgenic mosquitoes to render infertile female transmitters of the disease, officials said.

Health Ministry director Carlos Galvez told AFP the technique has "shown promise" in Brazil and the Cayman Islands.

In Panama, it is being run by the Instituto Gorgas tropical research institute.

"The GM male mosquitoes have contact with the females that transmit dengue; then the eggs the (non-GM) females lay no longer produce (dengue-)transmitting mosquitoes," he explained.

Galvez said the GM mosquitoes are not a danger to humans because they do not feed on blood, but rather on fruit.

GM mosquitoes live for just a week, while normal ones live for a month.

The ministry plans to release the GM bugs in two weeks, numbering in the hundreds for each estimated dengue-transmitting female.

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