

Dengue deaths soar in Malaysia

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Deaths from dengue fever have nearly tripled in Malaysia this year compared to the same period in 2013, sparking a stepped-up campaign to control the mosquitos that spread the virus.

As of this week, 22 people had died from dengue in 2014, compared to eight deaths over the same stretch last year, Health Minister S. Subramaniam told AFP on Tuesday.

While still early in the year, at the current pace the numbers would surpass 2010, the deadliest year on record, when 134 people died from an illness that the World Health Organisation calls one of the fastest-growing viral threats globally, especially in the tropics.

A total of 11,879 cases had been reported as of Monday, up nearly four-fold from the same period in 2013.

"I think the number of cases will increase," Subramaniam said.

"We urge the public to play their role. The spike in cases is putting a strain on our medical services," he said, calling on Malaysians to eliminate mosquito breeding sites such as standing water and garbage piles.

More than 43,000 cases were reported in 2013, with 92 deaths, up from 35 dead the year before.

"Every three to four years, we witness a peak in the cycle,"

Subramaniam said.

Dengue fever is a flu-like illness marked by symptoms including nausea, headache, and severe muscle and joint pain that gives rise to its nickname "break-bone fever".

In severe cases, it can cause internal bleeding, organ impairment, respiratory distress and death.

Dengue is transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which can pick up the virus from an infected human and transmit it to the next person it bites.

According to the World Health Organisation, the disease may be infecting up to 50-100 million people each year.

There is no vaccine, so prevention focuses on [mosquito control](#).

Malaysian authorities have stepped up a nationwide campaign to fumigate or eliminate mosquito breeding hotbeds in standing water, garbage dumps and construction sites.

This includes what authorities have called the first large-scale use in Malaysia of the biological agent *bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*, or BTI, a naturally-occurring bacterium used in insect control.

The government also has ordered local clinics in dengue "hot spot" areas—which have been concentrated in and around the capital Kuala Lumpur—to extend their operating hours to accommodate the roughly 2,000 new cases emerging weekly.

"Hot spot" residents also are being advised to wear long sleeves and use mosquito repellent.

Researchers estimate around three billion people live in regions of the world susceptible to dengue.

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