

Colombia issues alert over expanding Zika virus

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Colombia issued an alert Tuesday over the Zika virus, which has already infected 13,800 people in the country, as it warned that the number is likely to uptick as the disease spreads.

The Ministry of Health advised mayors of towns below a certain elevation to "declare a green alert for public and private hospitals facing a possible increase in Zika cases."

All municipalities located below 2,200 meters (7,200 feet) were urged to issue an alert, the ministry said in a statement.

"This warning is issued because the Zika infection is currently in an expansion phase," said Luis Fernando Correa, head of the ministry's Office of Emergency Management and Disaster.

The [virus](#) has proliferated across a number of Latin American and Caribbean countries, causing particular alarm among [pregnant women](#) because it is linked to the birth of babies with abnormally small heads, a condition known as microcephaly.

Already in Brazil, Zika has been linked to 3,893 cases of microcephaly.

The Zika virus is transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which can also carry dengue and chikungunya, and there is no cure or vaccine.

Its flu-like symptoms (fever, headache, body aches) are accompanied by

rashes or outbreaks that appear three to 12 days after a bite from an infected mosquito.

Colombia, which has been hit the hardest by the disease after Brazil, expects to have more than 600,000 cases in 2016.

As of January 16 there have been a total of 13,808 confirmed cases in Colombia, which includes 890 pregnant women, plus an additional 2,611 suspected cases.

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