

'Extreme' US worry about Zika impact in Haiti

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A top US health official expressed "extreme concern" Friday over the potential for Zika to expand throughout Haiti and said the United States is helping the deeply impoverished Caribbean nation prepare.

There was "extreme concern of Haiti in terms of impact that dengue has there, and of course, the vulnerable population is a challenge," said Anne Schuchat, principal deputy director of the US Centers for Disease Control.

Schuchat spoke while in the Brazilian capital of Brasilia studying an outbreak of the Zika virus, which is widely believed to cause microcephaly, a serious [birth defect](#), in babies born to infected women.

The virus is transmitted by the same mosquito responsible for carrying dengue, a far more common disease.

The US expert said that with the northern hemisphere summer approaching, a rise in mosquito numbers is expected and Haiti, which confirmed its first cases of Zika in January, needs to prepare.

The "CDC has a very strong partnership in Haiti and we are already working on how to help them be ready for this," she told AFP.

"We are concerned about many countries. Certainly in Colombia they have seen a rapid increase in Zika cases," she said. "In the US we are working very closely with Puerto Rico and we are very concerned about

the months ahead."

Most people who get Zika suffer no serious symptoms, but pregnant women are considered to be at risk and have been advised by numerous governments not to travel to Zika-prone countries.

Brazil said this week that it has registered 508 cases of microcephaly since October, a huge increase on the average annual number of 150.

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