

Zika spreads in Latin America: 50 cases in Panama

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Panama on Monday said it has 50 cases of Zika virus infections and warned that the mosquito-borne disease, which is linked to birth defects, will end up spreading across the Central American nation.

"Let's be clear: it (Zika) is going to enter, it is going to spread," the head of the [health](#) ministry's epidemiological department, Israel Cedeno, told the television network TVN-2.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday declared the virus a global health emergency.

The 50 cases confirmed so far in Panama were concentrated in the predominantly indigenous Guna Yala region along its Caribbean coast.

Vice President Isabel De Saint Malo last week had spoken of 38 cases in Guna Yala and said at the time that "there is no big public health risk."

Although symptoms of the disease are relatively mild, it is believed to be linked to a surge in cases of microcephaly, a devastating condition in which a baby is born with an abnormally small head and brain.

It is also believed to be linked to a neurological disorder called Guillain-Barre syndrome.

Infections have been reported in 13 countries in the Americas, according to WHO, as well as in Asia, and in Africa, from where it originated.

Panama borders Colombia, which has so far reported more than 20,000 [cases](#) of Zika, including 2,100 in pregnant women. Colombia is forecasting it will see more than 650,000 infections.

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