

Cuba announces first case of Zika, imported from Venezuela

March 2 2016, by Michael Weissenstein



A horse grazes amid fumigation fog, released to kill *Aedes Aegypti* mosquitos, in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, Tuesday, March 1, 2016. Authorities are fumigating in an attempt to prevent the spread of Zika, Chikungunya and Dengue. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

Cuba announced Wednesday that it had detected the first case of the Zika virus on the island, which had been one of the last nations in the Western Hemisphere free of the disease.

The Ministry of Health said in state media that a 28-year-old Venezuelan post-doctoral student in gastroenterology arrived in the country Feb. 21 and a day later came down a high fever and rash. The government says the woman was under medical quarantine in Artemisa province outside Havana with other newly arrived doctors when her symptoms were detected.

An initial test for Zika was negative but a second test on Feb. 28 was positive, health officials said. The woman remains hospitalized in good condition at Cuba's main tropical disease hospital in Havana, officials said. The woman's husband and brother-in-law had both come down with Zika in Venezuela in recent weeks. The medical professionals who had entered Cuba alongside the sick woman remain in quarantine with no sign of Zika, officials said.

The Health Ministry made no mention of any case of Zika transmitted inside Cuba.

President Raul Castro announced Feb. 22 that the country was militarizing its fight to kill disease-carrying mosquitos, assigning 9,000 soldiers to spray for the insects nationwide. Since then, soldiers, police and health workers have launched an intense door-to-door effort to fumigate for mosquitos.



A man drives his horse-drawn carriage through fumigation fog, sprayed to kill *Aedes Aegypti* mosquitoes, in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, Tuesday, March 1, 2016. Authorities are fumigating in an attempt to prevent the spread of Zika, Chikungunya and Dengue. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

Gaps had been increasingly obvious in the effort to spray homes and businesses for the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which has infected thousands of Cubans with the dengue virus and dozens with chikungunya, a disease that causes fever and severe joint pain. Cubans frequently claimed allergies or asthma to put off fumigation crews composed of public health workers and teenagers completing obligatory military service.

Those days appear to be ending as troops deployed across the country with hand-held foggers are now armed with the threat of fines for anyone who resists fumigation and fog-spraying trucks and small airplanes are blanketing the capital and other cities with white clouds of pesticide.

In Cuba's airports and cruise ship terminals, crews of white-clad doctors are monitoring incoming travelers for high temperatures or other signs of illness. Medical officials said the fight against Zika had taken on increasing urgency as Cuba's hot, humid spring and summer draw near.

Cuba earns billions of dollars a year from programs that dispatch doctors to allied countries like Venezuela and Brazil and bring medical students to Cuba. Wednesday's report appeared to imply that those medical professionals were now being quarantined on return.



People make their way through fumigation fog, sprayed to kill *Aedes Aegypti* mosquitos, in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, Tuesday, March 1, 2016. Authorities are fumigating in an attempt to prevent the spread of Zika, Chikungunya and Dengue. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)

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