

Malaysia reports first suspected Zika case

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Malaysia on Thursday reported its first suspected case of Zika, a woman believed to have contracted it in neighbouring Singapore where more than 150 infections have now been confirmed.

The 58-year-old is believed to have contracted the Zika virus after visiting her daughter in the city-state in late August, Malaysia's health ministry said in a statement, though full confirmation via blood tests is pending.

"The source of infection is suspected to have occurred in Singapore," the statement said.

Singapore authorities said Thursday that 150 people have now tested positive for the virus, including two pregnant women, as well as foreigners living and working there.

The Aedes mosquito-borne Zika, which has been detected in 67 countries and territories, causes only mild symptoms for most people but pregnant women who catch it can give birth to babies with abnormally small brains and heads.

Singapore depends heavily on foreign labour, and industries like construction and the marine sector are dominated by workers from China and South Asia.

Those infected in Singapore include people from China, India and Bangladesh, as well as individuals from Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia

and Taiwan, the health ministry said earlier.

Singapore is one of Asia's cleanest cities with high healthcare standards, but is a densely populated tropical island with heavy rainfall and has a chronic problem with dengue fever, also spread by the same *Aedes* mosquito.

Health officials on Thursday sought to reassure the international community that the disease is under control after the United States and Britain joined Australia and Taiwan in advising pregnant women to avoid non-essential travel to the city-state.

"I don't think there's a need for us to press the panic button," said Derek Ho, director-general for public health at the National Environment Agency (NEA).

NEA workers have been ramping up efforts to eradicate mosquitoes, expanding a fumigation campaign centred around several eastern suburbs.

Since the first locally-transmitted case was reported on Saturday, some 5,800 homes and shops have been inspected for mosquito breeding sites with 49 habitats destroyed, the NEA said.

"Our best defence is to eradicate mosquitos and destroy breeding habitats, all over Singapore," Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in a Facebook post Thursday.

Indonesia and Malaysia have intensified monitoring of border points for passengers arriving from Singapore.

Tropical Malaysia—which already has also struggled in recent years to control the spread of dengue fever—has been bracing for Zika after

Singapore last weekend reported a surge in cases.

Despite the rise in Zika cases, a spokesman for the Singapore Grand Prix told AFP Wednesday the Formula One race will go on as scheduled from September 16-18.

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