

Brazil maintains Zika emergency status

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Brazil said Friday that it will continue to treat the Zika outbreak as an emergency, even as the World Health Organization considers whether to downgrade it from crisis status.

Brazil has been the epicenter of a Zika epidemic since the mosquito-carried virus, which is blamed for causing severe birth defects, caused a global alarm last year.

The WHO was meeting later Friday in Geneva to discuss whether it would still classify the Zika outbreak as a "[public health emergency](#) of international concern."

However in the Brazilian capital Brasilia, officials said they are not yet ready to lower their guard.

"We will maintain the [emergency](#) (status) in Brazil until we are completely tranquil about the situation," Health Minister Ricardo Barros told journalists.

Officials say that Zika appears to be on the wane in Brazil, but that data is not sure enough to be certain.

"Last year we didn't have enough tests (to detect Zika), so we can't specify how the virus circulated last year," said Wanderson Oliveira, in charge of emergencies response at the [health](#) ministry.

"We don't have a reference to establish whether it is increasing or

decreasing," he said.

Since the Zika epidemic was detected in 2015, Brazil has confirmed 2,143 cases of microcephaly, where babies are born with abnormally small skulls and other congenital disorders such as brain development problems.

However, in nearly all cases, Zika causes only temporary effects which include a rash and flu-like symptoms.

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