

Italy orders investigation after child dies of malaria

September 5 2017



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Italy's health ministry has ordered an investigation into the death of a

4-year-old girl from malaria after checks determined she hadn't traveled to any country at risk for the disease.

The child died Monday at the Brescia public hospital after being transferred from Trento. Italy is not known to have the kind of mosquitoes that spread malaria.

The health ministry said Tuesday it is sending a team of experts to the Trento hospital to determine how the girl got infected, since she hadn't made any trips to countries with the parasitic disease.

Malaria is a tropical disease that mostly strikes children in Africa, although parts of Asia, Latin America and the Middle East are also at risk. The disease is estimated to have killed more than 420,000 people last year.

In recent years, European health officials have noted several isolated cases of locally acquired malaria, including one case in Rome in 2009.

Suspicion fell on the Trento facility because it was treating two other children with malaria. But the disease does not spread easily between people and typically either requires a mosquito bite or blood transfusion. The ANSA news agency quoted the head of the Trento health service, Paolo Bordon, as saying that the child received no blood transfusions and that the malaria-infected children were being treated in other rooms with single-use equipment.

Bordon suggested the girl might have caught it earlier, given the timing of her symptoms.

Malaria symptoms, which include fever, a headache and chills, typically appear about 10 days after an infected mosquito bite. Bordon said it was possible the girl might have contracted the disease before arriving at the

Trento hospital, possibly from a mosquito trapped in luggage.

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, there have been 75 cases of malaria linked to mosquitoes in luggage arriving in Western Europe from malaria-endemic countries in the past few decades.

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Citation: Italy orders investigation after child dies of malaria (2017, September 5) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-09-italy-child-dies-malaria.html>

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