

Brazil launches dengue vaccination amid outbreak

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Brazil launched a dengue fever immunization campaign Friday, becoming the first country in the world to provide the vaccine through its public health system as it deals with a surge in cases.

Health authorities registered more than 395,000 likely cases of the mosquito-borne disease in the first five weeks of the year, four times more than the same period last year.

At least 53 people have died of dengue in the [current outbreak](#), with officials still analyzing whether the disease was responsible for 281 other deaths.

With the country's famed carnival celebrations getting under way—fueling fears of further transmission—President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's health minister, Nisia Trindade, officially launched the vaccination drive in the capital, Brasilia.

"Even without the current epidemic we would have started this vaccination campaign, because dengue is a long-standing health problem," she told journalists.

The vaccine, known as Qdenga, is produced by Japanese pharmaceutical firm Takeda.

Supply shortages mean Brazil will only administer it to children ages 10 to 11 at first.

Officials hope to reach 3.2 million of Brazil's 203 million people by the end of the year.

The government says it is studying options to produce a vaccine domestically.

Dengue, which can cause [hemorrhagic fever](#), infects an estimated 100 million to 400 million people yearly, though most cases are mild or asymptomatic, according to the World Health Organization.

Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's most populous cities, have both taken emergency measures to contain dengue ahead of carnival, which draws millions of tourists from around the world.

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