

Dengue cases in Peru are surging, fueled by mosquitoes and high temperatures brought by El Niño

March 2 2024, by César Barreto



Jenny Chiroque, who suffering dengue, sits on a bed with netting at La Merced Hospital in Paita, Peru, Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024. Peru declared a health emergency in most of its provinces on Feb. 26 due to a growing number of dengue cases. Credit: AP Photo/Martin Mejia

Residents of Pedregal Grande, a poor neighborhood in the Peruvian city of Piura, receive water for only 30 minutes a day because of shortages, forcing them to collect it in plastic tanks that have become breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

Scorching temperatures and a lack of air conditioning force people out of their homes and they say the mosquitoes descend on them, fueling an alarming spread of dengue in this city and the South American country.

"You go out to get some air and the mosquitoes arrive suddenly and attack you," said Segundo Ramos, a Peruvian driver who got the disease several days ago.

"My neighbor has dengue, over there they also have dengue," said Ramos, sitting in his one-story house, shirtless, with shorts and sandals as he endures the 97 degree (36 degree Celsius) temperature. "There are three or four sick neighbors within 100 meters."

With 5,275 dengue cases, Piura was by Friday the second hardest-hit city in Peru. A few days ago, it was the hardest hit. In total, Peru has registered more than 34,000 cases of dengue in the first eight weeks of this year, twice as high as in the same period in 2023, according to the nation's health ministry.

Peru's government declared a health emergency in most of its provinces on Monday due to the rising number of cases, which come amid higher than normal temperatures caused by the El Niño weather pattern.



Saline solution sits on a tray inside the ward for treating dengue patients at La Merced Hospital in Paita, Peru Thursday, Feb. 29, 2024. Peru declared a health emergency in most of its provinces on Feb. 26 due to a growing number of dengue cases. Credit: AP Photo/Martin Mejia

Authorities in Piura have begun setting up special areas in hospitals to receive dengue patients.

A dengue epidemic last year put Peru's public health system under strain as thousands sought care in emergency rooms. But while last year's epidemic killed 21 people in Peru, dengue has claimed the lives of 44 Peruvians in the first two months of this year alone.

Santiago Valdez, a specialist in [tropical diseases](#) sent to Piura, said the

[water shortage](#) and storage practices are fueling the disease, which is spread by *Aedes Aegypti*, a mosquito that reproduces in hot and [humid conditions](#).

"People are forced to collect (water) and no matter how much one tries to have closed containers, there is always carelessness and the mosquitoes take the opportunity to lay their eggs and reproduce," he said.

Although most dengue cases present light symptoms, the disease can cause severe headaches, fevers and muscle pains.

In December, the World Health Organization said that Peru's 2023 dengue epidemic was linked to rains and hot temperatures that helped mosquito populations to grow, especially in the north of the country.

Health Minister César Vásquez acknowledged on Thursday that [dengue](#) "is not under control" and the cases "will continue to grow."

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