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Venezuela in grip of severe tropical disease outbreak: NGOs

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Venezuela is in the grip of one of the worst outbreaks of tropical diseases in decades, and the response by public health authorities has been slow and inefficient, two non-governmental groups reported Tuesday.

In 2014, Venezuela had over 150,000 recorded cases of dengue, malaria, and Chikungunya, the report said.

The country also had 1.2 million fever episodes without a precise diagnoses, according to the report by the Health Observatory and another group called We Defend the Epidemiology of Venezuelan Society.

The epidemic is one of the worst in 25 years, said former health minister Jose Felix Oletta, who was among the authors of the report.

"And we're still in the expansion phase, this problem will continue," Oletta told AFP.

The spread of the diseases coincides with a crisis in the Venezuelan health sector that has been plagued with a shortage of drugs and medical equipment.

Health organizations have issued warnings on the outbreak and their records suggest the government may be undercounting the number of infected people.

"We have an inefficient health system that is not informed and tackles the problems late. They knew for 20 weeks that the Chikungunya virus was in Venezuela before the government began to require notification of cases," Oletta said.

The majority of the country's health supplies are imported and its strict import controls require the private sector to petition the government for imports. Some requests have been delayed for up to two years.

Dengue, malaria, and Chikungunya are diseases transmitted by mosquitoes that cause intense fever and pain. There is no vaccine for the diseases.

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