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Ecuador hit with first Zika virus cases

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Ecuador said Friday it has detected its first two cases of the Zika virus, a mosquito-borne disease similar to dengue fever that has been linked to birth defects.

Ecuadoran officials had previously detected four people who arrived from other countries with the disease, which is spreading through Latin America and the Caribbean.

But this is the first time it has been transmitted on Ecuadoran soil, said Veronica Espinosa, deputy cabinet minister responsible for monitoring outbreaks.

"We have now detected, confirmed by laboratory tests, the first two native cases. That is, we now have cases of the virus being transmitted by mosquito bites that happened in Ecuadoran territory," she told a press conference.

Health Minister Margarita Guevara said the two patients were a 23-year-old woman infected in the northwest and a 15-year-old boy infected in the southwest.

She said they were in stable condition.

Zika can cause fever, rash, joint pain and conjunctivitis, with symptoms usually lasting less than a week.

But in pregnant women, the virus can spread to the fetus and cause brain

shrinkage or death.

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