Medical Xpress

Honduran hospitals overrun by dengue fever epidemic

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Of Honduras' 32 public hospitals, 26 are overflowing with patients due to what health authorities are calling the worst dengue fever epidemic in the past half century.

The disease has struck 28,000 people this year, of which 54, mostly children, have died.

The enormous case flow is evident in the western city of La Paz. Inside the local hospital's chapel, two tables are piled high with patient folders, which sit in front of a wooden depiction of Christ.

Even more telling are the beds lining the room, protected by red and blue mosquito nets, from which 10 women are being treated for some of dengue's typical symptoms: bone and joint pain, high fever, vomiting and dehydration.

Officials have called a national emergency to fight the dengue-causing aedes aegypti mosquito and a fumigation program has been launched in homes and public buildings.

And yet the hospital bursts at the seams. On top of those housed in the chapel, six of the facility's eight rooms are taken up by those stricken by dengue, with some beds even in the corridors.

Three of the rooms house a total of 26 children, age two to 14—the most vulnerable group to dengue—who are connected to IV bags and

monitored by concerned parents.

"They're not all out of danger," said a nurse as she looked over the patients.

'We're overrun'

Crista Alexandra Pineda, age seven, is one of the children whose health is worrying hospital staff the most.

She was admitted on Sunday suffering from bleeding, accompanied by her 59-year-old grandmother, Josefina Velasquez.

"We're overrun," hospital spokesman Marco Antonio Rodas told AFP.

"We had to postpone planned operations" to concentrate on the emergencies.

"In 20 years working here, I've never seen this," he added.

Over the last week, the number of patients rose from 53 to 78. The most serious cases were transferred by ambulance to the University Hospital in the capital Tegucigalpa, where already two have died, Rodas said.

He hasn't ruled out the possibility of taking over schools to accommodate patients who are "arriving in ever greater numbers."

Marta Zoila Lopez, 58, told AFP she was at home in Guajiquiro, close to a La Paz, on Sunday when she started feeling symptoms.

"At first I had pain in my stomach, head and bones, vomiting and bleeding" from her nose and gums. She was immediately taken to the hospital where nurses say she's still in a delicate condition.

President Juan Orlando Hernandez summoned all 298 municipal mayors to the capital on Monday and announced a special fund to combat the outbreak.

The only effective measure to halt the epidemic "is to destroy the mosquito's breeding grounds and this is something that every one of us has to do in our homes, where we work and also in every public area," said Hernandez.

He also announced a "massive mobilization" to fumigate and destroy those breeding grounds. Churches, press organizations and business leaders have committed to assisting the effort.

It's a critical situation with the three-month long rainy season about to begin, meaning that breeding grounds will soon proliferate and the mosquito's numbers could soar.

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