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FEATURED Q&A

Why Are Cases of Dengue Soaring in Honduras?



Honduras this year is seeing its worst-ever outbreak of dengue fever, which is spread by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. // File Photo: James Gathany via Creative Commons.

Q Honduras is using high-tech mapping and mobile phone applications to combat the country's worst dengue fever outbreak on record, with some 92,000 suspected cases and 250 deaths registered so far this year, according to medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières. What are the reasons behind the spread of the mosquito-borne disease this year, and what is the Honduran government doing to fight it? What role are the private sector and national and international nonprofit organizations playing? What else can be done, and what other technological tools are available, to prevent and combat dengue fever in Honduras and the rest of the region?

A Katherine Bliss, senior fellow at the CSIS Global Health Policy Center: "Honduras experiences yearly outbreaks of dengue virus, transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, but this year's outbreak is the worst in five decades. The majority of cases are concentrated in the Cortés, Santa Bárbara and Comayagua departments. Nearly 20 percent of cases are classified as severe, and the fatality rate is the highest in Latin America, with two-thirds of deaths among children under the age of 15. Several factors explain the challenges associated with this year's outbreak: increased rainfall, leading to a greater number of mosquito breeding sites; inadequacy of prevention measures, such as applying larvicide to containers of standing water where mosquitoes breed; and turmoil within the health sector, as doctors have joined national strikes to protest proposed health and education reforms. The Pan American Health Organization has provided technical advice to the government of Honduras, which has declared a national

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China to Help El Salvador Build Infrastructure

China and El Salvador announced new cooperation on infrastructure projects, including a water treatment plant, a stadium, streets and parks.

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Protesters Set Fires, Block Roads in Dominica

The opposition has demanded electoral reforms ahead of a planned vote on Friday. Amid the protests, demonstrators blocked a road to the Caribbean island's main airport.

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ECONOMIC

Brazil's Economy Grows at Fastest Pace Since 2018

Brazil's economy, the largest in Latin America, in the third quarter experienced its fastest growth since early last year. Analysts said President Jair Bolsonaro's economic policies helped drive business expansion.

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Bolsonaro // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil's Economy Grows at Fastest Rate Since Beginning of '18

Brazil's economy in the third quarter grew at its fastest rate since the start of last year, expanding 0.6 percent in the July-to-September period and beating analysts' expectations, according to quarter-on-quarter results released Tuesday, the Financial Times reported. The figures sparked hope that Latin America's largest economy is coming out of a period of sluggish growth that followed its worst recession on record. "We are seeing a cyclical recovery,"

“Industry is still suffering from international headwinds, but there are some segments doing very well, such as agribusiness and real estate.”

— Sérgio Vale

Sérgio Vale, chief economist at MB Associa-dos, told the Financial Times. "From now on, we might see a faster recovery. Industry is still suffering from international headwinds, but there are some segments doing very well, such as agribusiness and real estate," he added. Compared to the same quarter last year, the economy expanded 1.2 percent, above analysts' expectations of 0.9 percent, according to the report. Consumer spending and business investment also increased in the third quarter, amid low inflation, low borrowing costs and President Jair Bolsonaro's business-friendly economic policies, which have prompted companies to raise money to finance future expansion, The Wall Street Journal reported. "This really strengthens the view that Brazil's economy is starting to speed up," Roberto Padovani, chief economist at Banco Votorantim in São Paulo, told the newspaper, adding that a stronger economy is "fundamental" for

Brazil to withstand slower growth in the United States, China and Europe, The Wall Street Journal reported.

China to Help El Salvador Build New Infrastructure

China will help El Salvador build several new infrastructure projects, including a water treatment plant and a stadium, as well as streets, parks and a water system in coastal tourist areas, the two nations announced Tuesday, Reuters reported. The countries did not disclose the value of the investments, which signal strengthening ties between the two countries following El Salvador's move to cut ties with Taiwan last year in favor of establishing relations with China. Taiwan currently has diplomatic relations with just 15 countries, including Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. China's new investment in El Salvador represents a "gigantic, non-refundable cooperation," said Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, who met Tuesday with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. "You have shown strategic vision as a statesman and shouldered historical responsibility," Xi told Bukele during their talks in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Chinese



Bukele, Xi and their wives met Tuesday in Beijing. // Photo: Xinhua.

state-run news agency Xinhua reported. El Salvador "adheres to the principle of one China, categorically rejects any act that goes against this principle and any form of independence of Taiwan," the countries said in a joint statement, Reuters reported. The two nations added that El Salvador will participate in China's Belt and Road Initiative. In addition, China's foreign ministry said Xi told Bukele that China plans to

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazil's Pharmaceutical Regulator Approves Medical Cannabis Rules

Brazilian pharmaceutical regulator Anvisa on Tuesday approved regulations for medical cannabis-based products but voted to block a proposal allowing domestic marijuana cultivation, Reuters reported. As a result, Brazilian firms interested in manufacturing cannabis products would need to import inputs from other countries, a spokesman for Anvisa said. Neighbor nations including Colombia and Uruguay have legalized medical marijuana, and both have been actively working to participate in the booming multibillion-dollar global market, Reuters reported.

U.S. Exempts Venezuelan Baseball From Sanctions

The U.S. Treasury Department has exempted Venezuela's local baseball league from government sanctions, allowing transactions with it, Reuters reported Tuesday, citing a Treasury document. The decision means that players under contract with the United States' Major League Baseball, or MLB, teams or their minor league affiliates can participate in the Venezuelan league, known as the LVBP. The MLB previously prohibited its players from taking part, pending the U.S. government's authorization, Reuters reported.

Postmates Closes Mexico City Office, Lays Off Dozens of Employees

Food-delivery start-up Postmates has closed its Mexico City office and laid off dozens of employees, CNBC reported Tuesday. The company, which competes in food delivery with companies including DoorDash, GrubHub and Uber, reportedly began the layoffs this week. The layoffs included employees in its San Francisco headquarters, as well as in Los Angeles, Nashville and elsewhere, sources told CNBC.

import more goods from the Central American nation, including coffee and sugar. China's push to strengthen ties in Latin America has drawn criticism from the United States, whose government said last year that China was using economic benefits for countries in the region in order to dominate it. Last month, Taiwan's foreign minister said China had failed to deliver \$8.6 billion in promised aid to nations that had broken ties with Taiwan and instead "exported corruption." Beijing called the assertion a smear.

POLITICAL NEWS

Argentine President-Elect to Announce Cabinet on Friday

Argentine President-elect Alberto Fernández, who takes office this month, has chosen his cabinet and will reveal it on Friday, he said in a social media post on Tuesday, *La Nación* reported. "The cabinet is defined. Everything is already chosen and we are all working. We present it on Friday at 6 pm [local time]," Fernández said on Twitter, Reuters reported. In a radio interview earlier that day, Fernández said that his vice president, former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, did not "fill [the cabinet] with her own names," but that she "influenced as much as any other person whose opinion I value," *La Nación* reported. Fernández added that Sergio Massa, a well-known politician of Peronism's moderate wing and a former presidential candidate, is another person whose perspective he took into account. Argentina's creditors, energy investors and grains traders have been awaiting Fernández's cabinet picks for weeks as speculation over whether Fernández's government will shift toward populism continues, Reuters reported. Fernández said last week that he would renounce to the remaining \$11 billion disbursement of Argentina's standby loan deal with the International Monetary Fund, MercoPress reported. Fernández's government is set to take office on Dec. 10.

Protesters Set Fires, Block Roads in Dominica

Protesters demanding electoral reforms on Tuesday set fires and blocked roads in Dominica, including the one leading to the main airport, the Associated Press reported. The demonstrations forced some airline passengers to drag luggage through streets for more than a mile in order to get to Douglas-Charles Airport. The eastern Caribbean island holds elections on Friday, and the opposition United

Workers' Party has demanded that the ruling party enact reforms that could reduce its advantage, the wire service reported. Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit has not enacted the reforms, leading to accusations that his government is acting unfairly. The opposition wants more rigorous checks of voter registrations, as well as a ban on expatriate citizens returning to the island in order to vote. Opposition leaders have also accused the government of buying airline tickets for its supporters to return home in order to cast their ballots. Skerrit has said the elections will proceed, and High Court Judge Bernie Stephenson said she did not have jurisdiction to block the vote.

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emergency and set up a special fund to step up fumigation activities; the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is supporting home visits by personnel trained to eliminate breeding sites; the government of Costa Rica, which is experiencing its own dengue outbreak, has donated insecticides to Honduras; and the United States, through USAID and the U.S. Southern Command, has delivered fumigation equipment to officials in Comayagua. But with tests showing that nearly two-thirds of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes in the affected region are resistant to fumigation chemicals, accelerating international efforts to develop a safe and effective vaccine against the various dengue subtypes is critical."

A **Rachel Lowe, associate professor in the Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine:** "2019 has seen the highest number of dengue cases ever reported in the Americas, with Honduras among the top three countries reporting the highest incidence rates. All four dengue serotypes are present in the region, and the last major epidemic was in 2015. The exact reasons for this year's record number of dengue cases is unclear, but it may have been related to worker shortages due to proposed changes

in public health care. Lower levels of dengue transmission in the past few years will have allowed population immunity to the different dengue virus serotypes to wane, and mosquito control efforts may have relaxed. Honduras has also experienced drought con-

“Affected individuals should be encouraged to seek timely medical assistance to minimize potential complications.”

— Rachel Lowe

ditions this year, which could have changed water storage practices and increased mosquito breeding sites. Given the increase in cases of dengue and severe dengue, both disease surveillance as well as surveillance and control of the *Aedes* mosquitoes that transmit the disease to humans should be enhanced, at both the national and community levels. This should include eliminating mosquito breeding sites in and around the home, improving environmental hygiene to minimize discarded waste and ensuring water storage containers are covered and well maintained. Affected individuals should be encouraged to seek timely medical assis-

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tance to minimize potential complications. The peak in dengue cases occurred earlier than expected this year, emphasizing the need to develop early warning systems to estimate the timing and intensity of dengue outbreaks several months in advance, and to guide early interventions. In our lab, we are developing dengue prediction models, which integrate seasonal climate forecast information along with environmental and socioeconomic risk factors, to estimate the probability of dengue outbreaks up to seven months in advance in parts of Latin America and the Caribbean and Southeast Asia."

A **Ricardo Izurieta, director of global communicable diseases, and Tatiana Gardellini, master of science in public health candidate, both at the College of Public Health at the University of South Florida:** "Honduras is fighting its worst dengue outbreak in decades. During this year, until epidemiological week 42 (Oct. 19-26), Honduras had reported 91,681 suspected cases (according to the ministry of health), which is more than 10 times the number of cases reported last year. Considering the heterogeneity of the clinical presentations of the disease and its 14-28 ratio of underreport cases, we should expect a real number largely exceeding the number of cases reported. Even worse, 248 deaths have been related to this epidemic, 151 of which were laboratory-confirmed. As expected, children under 15 years of

age have been the most affected by severe dengue. DEN-1 and DEN-2 have been reported as the circulating serotypes. The sequence DEN-1 as first infection with DEN-2

“Unfortunately, dengue has been yet another neglected tropical disease.”

— Ricardo Izurieta & Tatiana Gardellini

as the second infection has been described as the most likely factor that unleashes the 'immunological storm' in hemorrhagic dengue. Unfortunately, dengue has been yet another neglected tropical disease. Not even one antiviral drug has been developed against this virus, the approved vaccine was withdrawn from the market due to adverse side effects, the pathophysiology of hemorrhagic dengue is still an enigma, *Aedes* spp. mosquitoes have developed resistance to most of the available insecticides, and genetically modified mosquitoes are a totally unsustainable control measure. Moreover, many epidemiological surveillance systems in Latin America have been dismantled by governments that want to erase evidence of the collapse of their public health programs."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gene.kuleta@thedialogue.org.

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