

Highest incidence in the Americas: Cuba reports over 47,000 cases of dengue and chikungunya



Insect control against dengue fever (source: [Adelante](#))

Cuba is experiencing what is probably the most severe outbreak of dengue and chikungunya fever in its history. According to official figures, 47,125 people are currently receiving medical treatment for symptoms of the tropical disease. This was announced by the epidemiological director of the Ministry of Health, [Francisco Durán](#), on state television on Wednesday.

This figure is more than double the approximately 20,000 cases reported to date. Last week, the government used the word “epidemic” for the first time to describe the nationwide outbreak of both viral diseases, [reports](#) the news agency *EFE*.

On Tuesday alone, the health system registered 1,706 new suspected cases and admitted 3,226 patients for treatment, Durán said. 84.1 percent of the treatments are being carried out at home.

Dengue and chikungunya are viral tropical diseases, both of which are transmitted by mosquitoes of the genus [Aedes aegypti](#) and are spreading worldwide. While dengue often has an abrupt onset, similar to the flu, with high fever, severe headaches and limb pain, and occasional bleeding tendencies, chikungunya is primarily characterized by pronounced joint pain that can last for months. In most cases, both diseases heal on their own, but they can also lead to severe and life-threatening complications.

Severe cases in children are cause for concern

The situation is particularly alarming in the case of severe cases: 126 people are currently in critical or serious condition in hospitals or intensive care units due to chikungunya. Nineteen minors are currently in intensive care units and are in critical condition due to complications from the disease. Due to the number of cases, this disease is currently “the main health problem” on the island, according to Durán.

The epidemiologist acknowledged that the recorded figures represent only a fraction of the actual infections. “The figures recorded in the statistics do not always correspond to reality because many people do not go to the doctor,” he explained. Cuba does not have enough tests to confirm the virus in every patient and in most cases diagnoses the viral disease based on symptoms.

Highest incidence in the Americas

Between October 11 and November 1, authorities identified 15,590 cases of chikungunya, bringing the total number in the first ten months of the year to 20,062, according to data from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

With this total, the cumulative incidence of chikungunya in Cuba reached 183.43 cases per 100,000 inhabitants—the highest in the Americas this year. This exceeds both Brazil (112.07) and the averages for the Caribbean (43.53) and the entire continent (26.00).

Climate change, waste, and demographics as drivers

Dr. Ileana Morales Suárez, national director of science and technological innovation at the Ministry of Health, attributed the outbreak to global factors. On the television program *Mesa Redonda* (“Round Table”), [she cited](#) climate change as the main cause of the spread: “The high temperatures have a direct impact on the vector.” The more heat there is, the more warmth and humidity are generated, which favors the spread.

She identified other factors such as urban environmental problems, which have [further exacerbated](#) in the wake of the current economic crisis on the island. First and foremost are the accumulation of waste in public spaces, problems with the drinking water supply, and poor hygiene.

Specific to Cuba is the fact that the country has “a high number of vulnerable people.” Chikungunya is relatively new to Cuba, and as a result, there is little immunity after infection. Vulnerability is exacerbated by the advanced age of the population. “Practically one in four Cubans is already 60 years of age or older,” Morales Suárez explained.

Healthcare system under pressure

Prevention and control capacities – mainly through mass spraying (*fumigación*) against

mosquitoes, the availability of tests, and patient care – have been affected by the country's severe economic crisis.

In response, the government activated an innovation committee modeled on the Covid-19 pandemic. "Five new studies were approved this week and we have more research in the pipeline," Morales Suárez reported. These include the development of new products, clinical trials, and complex health interventions.

The first health interventions are focusing on older adults and will begin in Havana. One immediate measure is the use of the Cuban-developed immunomodulator Biomodulina T in older adults between the ages of 70 and 74. At the same time, flu vaccinations for people over 75 will begin in the capital.

Special risk for children

Dr. Lissette López González, head of the national pediatrics group, urged increased vigilance for children under five years of age. The current protocol requires mandatory hospitalization for all patients under two years of age.

"Newborns, and especially those under three months of age, have a high rate of morbidity and severity of the disease due to their immunological immaturity," López explained. Among the atypical cases in [neonatal](#) and [pediatric](#) wards, she identified difficult-to-treat convulsions and infections of the central nervous system. López appealed to families to make the protection of children and infants a high priority. ([Cubaheute](#))