

PAHO highlights an increase in dengue, Oropouche, and avian influenza cases in the Americas, and advises control measures

Washington, D.C., December 10, 2024 (PAHO) — The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) today reported on three transmissible diseases affecting the Region of the Americas: dengue, Oropouche, and avian influenza (H5N1). PAHO Director Dr. Jarbas Barbosa expressed concern over the increase in cases in 2024 but emphasized effective strategies to control the outbreaks and mitigate their impact.

Dengue: Historic epidemic in the Americas

This year, the region has faced the largest [dengue](#) epidemic since records began in 1980. Countries have reported more than 12.6 million cases, nearly three times more than in 2023, including 21,000 severe cases and over 7700 deaths.

Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico account for 90% of cases and 88% of deaths, with Brazil having the largest share.

"Dengue is posing a higher-than-normal risk to children. In countries like Guatemala, 70% of dengue-related deaths have occurred in children," Dr. Barbosa [said](#) during a press conference held today, highlighting that children under 15 represent over a third of severe cases in countries like Costa Rica, Mexico, and Paraguay.

The PAHO Director explained that the situation is linked to climate events favoring mosquito proliferation, as well as to unplanned urbanization, accumulated water around the home, and poor waste management, which create breeding grounds for the vector.

Despite the challenges, he insisted that "we are not powerless against dengue," and mentioned the implementation of PAHO's Integrated Management Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Arboviral Diseases as a key effort to "keep severe and fatal cases relatively low through better patient management."

Dengue vaccines have been introduced in countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Peru, and Honduras plans to do so in 2025. However, Dr. Barbosa noted that "the current vaccine will not stop the spread of the virus in the short or medium term and does not provide immediate relief during an outbreak."

Oropouche: Geographical expansion of the virus

PAHO has also observed an increase in cases of Oropouche virus, which is transmitted by infected midges and some mosquito species. In 2024, more than 11,600 cases have been reported in 12 countries and territories in the region, mostly in Brazil. "Although the Oropouche outbreak is on a much smaller scale than dengue, it requires our attention due to its increasing geographic spread" outside the Amazon Basin, including in areas with no prior history of the disease, Dr. Barbosa said.

The possibility of mother-to-child transmission, including fetal deaths and congenital anomalies, is being investigated. "Countries must strengthen their surveillance and continue sharing information. We must work across borders to monitor new cases and support health systems to respond," emphasized the PAHO Director.

Avian influenza (H5N1): Ongoing surveillance in the Region

Regarding the H5N1 virus, also known as avian influenza, Dr. Barbosa reported that while the number of human cases is moderate, the public health impact remains limited. He stated "In 2024, 58 human cases have been reported in the United States and 1 in Canada. This contrasts with the three cases reported in the previous two years for the entire region."

H5N1 is a virus commonly found in birds, but it is now infecting other species as well, such as dairy cattle in the United States. A total of 19 countries in the Americas have reported H5N1 cases in animals this year, and two of those countries have confirmed human cases. The PAHO Director emphasized that surveillance is key to tracking the virus and understanding its evolution.

Dr. Barbosa called for continued strengthening of cooperation between human, animal, and environmental health sectors to enable early detection and timely interventions in animals.

Regional collaboration key to facing outbreaks

The PAHO Director concluded the press conference by emphasizing the importance of collaboration among countries to address these challenges. "When countries share information, coordinate, and support responses to diseases, lives are saved," he underscored.

Dr. Barbosa stated that the Organization continues to work with the region's countries to strengthen their emergency response capacities and ensure coordinated action against current and future outbreaks.

Links

[Director's Remarks - PAHO Press Briefing on Dengue, Oropouche, and Avian Flu \(H5N1\) - 10 December 2024](#)

[Recording of the press briefing](#)

[Dengue](#)

[Dengue virus dashboard](#)

[Oropouche virus disease - Region of the Americas](#)

[Oropouche virus dashboard](#)

[Avian influenza](#)

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system (OAS).