

Cuba explores technique to reduce vector population

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By María Josefina Arce

When Latin America is reporting an increase in dengue cases, which have led the Pan American Health Organization to issue nine epidemiological alerts in recent months, Cuba is advancing in the use of a mechanism for the control of the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito, carrier of the virus of that disease and others such as Zika and Chikungunya.

This is the sterile insect technique that has been successfully used in the world for 50 years for the management of various insect pests of agricultural interest.

In recent days, male mosquitoes sterilized by ionizing radiation were released in Havana to reduce the population of this vector.

On this occasion, a drone was used to release the insects. A similar experience had already been carried out in the Cuban capital in 2019, but by land.

On each occasion, the local population has been kept informed by different means, including health hearings in the communities to evacuate all their doubts.

Now, in this new stage of the research, the aim is to contrast the effects of the aerial release with the terrestrial release in terms of survival, dispersion and competitiveness of the sterile male mosquitoes.

But they also want to demonstrate the effectiveness of this technique in reducing the risk of transmission of the disease, which according to experts is very difficult to investigate because it has four serotypes.

This study is led by the prestigious Pedro Kouri Institute of Tropical Medicine and has the support of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has been working closely with Cuba for years.

The Caribbean nation carries out an active epidemiological surveillance, especially during the summer months, when the *Aedes Aegypti* mosquito usually proliferates.

Health workers visit homes to detect possible breeding sites of the vector, while at the same time spraying is carried out, especially in areas where there have been cases of dengue.

With this study, the Cuban scientific community and health authorities are looking for other alternatives to protect the population from dengue, which in its most serious form can be fatal.

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