

Brazil to Develop New Zika Virus Vaccine in 'Record Time'



Brasilia, January 18 (teleSUR-RHC) -- The Brazilian Health ministry announced it has developed new testing kits to quickly identify the presence of Dengue, Zika and Chikungunya viruses, which are all carried by the same species of mosquito.

According to Brazil's Health Minister Marcelo Castro, priority testing will be given to pregnant women. Funds have also been allocated to finance a bio-medical research center to speed up the search for a Zika vaccine. In December the Brazilian Ministry of Health declared a state of emergency urging its citizens, especially pregnant women, to take precautions during the country's holiday season in order to reduce their exposure to the deadly mosquito-borne infection. The fever can cause unborn babies to develop microcephaly -- a neurological disorder that results in babies being born with abnormally small heads, causing severe developmental issues, brain damage and sometimes death.

At the moment the only method to combat the virus, which is spread by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, is to clear bodies of standing water.

The Health Ministry says at least 3,530 babies have been born with microcephaly in the country since October, a steep rise from 2014 when fewer than 150 such cases were recorded.

Some Brazilian women have decided to leave the country during their pregnancies to limit the prospect of catching the disease.

The rise in cases of the virus across the Americas and the Caribbean caused the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to warn pregnant women off travel to 14 countries and territories in the region on Friday. Earlier this month a woman in Hawaii gave birth to child who suffered brain damage as a result of the Zika virus, which the mother is believed to have contracted while living in Brazil.

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