

Mosquito-borne virus spreads rapidly in Haiti (Update)

13 May 2014

A mosquito-borne virus that was detected for the first time in Haiti last week has quickly spread throughout the Caribbean nation, a health official said Tuesday.

Some 1,529 cases of the chikungunya virus have been confirmed, said Ronald Singer, a spokesman for Haiti's health ministry. The bulk of the cases, about 900 of them, were found in the west department, where the capital of Port-au-Prince is located. Another 300 cases were confirmed in northwestern Haiti.

The new numbers seem to represent a startling jump over the past week. The health ministry said last Tuesday that lab results confirmed a mere 14 cases.

Since then, Port-au-Prince has been abuzz with people complaining about a sudden and debilitating illness that's been referred to as "the fever."

The symptoms of chikungunya include not just a sharp fever but also headache, full-body rash and joint pain. The illness is rarely fatal but recovery usually takes about a week. Some people experience joint pain for months to years.

The illness, which is most commonly found in Asia and Africa, was first detected in the Caribbean in December on tiny St. Martin.

It was the first time that local transmission of chikungunya had been reported in the Americas. Since then, it has spread to nearly a dozen other islands and French Guiana.

Its arrival in Haiti was expected. In neighboring Dominican Republic, authorities have confirmed at least 150 to 200 cases.

There is no vaccine for chikungunya and it is spread by the pervasive *Aedes aegypti* mosquito,

which also transmits dengue fever in the region.

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