



PRESS STATEMENT

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MOSQUITOES SPREAD CHIKUNGUNYA

Simple measures such as keeping homes clean, eliminating potential mosquito breeding places, and community awareness in mosquito avoidance measures can reduce the burden of arboviruses such as Chikungunya.

Chikungunya is the latest new disease that has been affecting many Papua New Guineans in recent months.

Its symptoms include - high fever, painful joints and muscles, headache, nausea, vomiting and sometimes rash on the body.

It is transmitted by two mosquito species *Aedes aegypti*, which also transmits yellow fever and dengue and *Aedes albopictus*.

“*Aedes albopictus* is the suspected vector which we believe is transmitting the Chikungunya virus (CHIKV) in Vanimo and other provinces because of its high density throughout the country,” said Dr Paul Horwood, Head of the Environmental and Emerging Diseases Unit at the PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR).

The CHIKV was first detected at the Vanimo hospital in late June last year with more than 1,500 cases reported.

“Following the initial report of this outbreak, Chikungunya outbreaks have been confirmed, by laboratory testing at IMR, from five provinces of PNG which are Madang, West New Britain, East New Britain, Morobe and Eastern Highlands while another three provinces - New Ireland, Simbu and Oro have suspected outbreaks,” said Dr Horwood.

“Interestingly, the outbreak has also extended to the highland region of PNG which is the first confirmed arboviral outbreak recorded in this region of the country,” he said.

Previous seroprevalence surveys found no evidence of arboviral activity above 1,500 meters elevation.

“This may have important implications as more than 50 per cent of the country’s population live in the highland region,” he said.

A survey carried out by IMR scientists in partnership with World Health Organization, National Department of Health and Sandaun Provincial Health Authority after the initial outbreak also observed that poor living conditions and the abundance of natural and artificial mosquito breeding sites were rife and infested with breeding of the *Aedes albopictus* mosquito species.

“This indicates how and why Chikungunya has spread.”

“It also highlights the importance of targeted vector control including active community participation for breeding sites elimination and increase community education in mosquito avoidance measures,” he said.

Such measures may provide a cost effective reduction in the burden of Chikungunya in PNG.

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