

DEN-1 Outbreak in the Pacific– Update as of 17 January 2003

Heading: Melanesia

After more than 2½ years, the number of victims of the DEN-1 outbreak in the Pacific region continues to rise.

The outbreak first emerged in mid-2000 in the northern Pacific, more precisely in Belau (Palau) in Micronesia, then, in 2001, (see update in Inform'ACTION 11) it spread to Polynesia, where it caused numerous victims, particularly in the Cook Islands, Samoa and French Polynesia (see summary published in this issue). In 2002, it gradually spread to Melanesia and neighbouring areas. A summary review of the evolution of the situation in 2002, compiled from information transmitted by Pacific island countries and territories, is presented below.

Summary of the evolution of the DEN-1 outbreak in 2002

French Polynesia

In 2002, the same surveillance system set up for the outbreak in 2001 continued to function. A total of 50 cases of Type 1 dengue fever, including one death, were reported between January and August 2002 (no cases after that time). The fairly steady decrease in the number of cases, e.g. 18 in January, 8 in February, 6 in March, 5 in April, 4 in May, confirmed the end of the outbreak and the switchover to an endemic phase. Distribution of hospitalised patients by severity remained the same as in 2001 (52% classical dengue, 22% severe forms and 26% severe forms with shock). A synopsis of the report on the epidemic in 2001 is presented in this issue of Inform'ACTION.

New Caledonia

All throughout 2002, there were confirmed cases of dengue fever in several locations in the Territory. As at 31 December 2002, the Pasteur Institute had registered a total of 98 positive cases, including 71 cases of DEN-1 and 27 cases whose serotype was not identified. On 17 January 2003, Health authorities of New Caledonia declared the beginning of a DEN-1 outbreak.

Solomon Islands

As one case of dengue fever imported into the Solomon Islands from New Caledonia had been reported, a dengue fever warning was issued to the National EpiNet team on 7 February 2002. The National Team members immediately went to work organising active surveillance. Rapid detection tests were conducted and they confirmed the virus' transmission to several regions in these islands (See article in Inform'ACTION 12 for more details).

Wallis and Futuna

A dengue fever outbreak emerged on the island of Wallis in early October 2002. The Type 1 dengue fever virus was identified by the New Caledonia Pasteur Institute.

DECEMBER 2002

As of 6 December 2002, the number of suspected cases was 512 on the island of Wallis and one death was recorded. Two cases had also been confirmed on the island of Futuna.

Fiji

A DEN-1 outbreak began on the island of Viti Levu in October 2002, with 51 confirmed cases in Lautoka, in the western part of the island, for the period November-December. Confirmation of the serotype was conducted by PCR at the Greg Smiths Laboratory in Brisbane. In total, 117 cases of dengue have been confirmed in 2002 and one death.

Vanuatu

As at 30 December 2002, an initial suspected case of dengue fever was reported in the northern part of Efate Island. As the rapid diagnosis test for dengue fever was positive, a blood sample was sent to Australia on 8 January for confirmation and identification of the virus' serotype.

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