

Letter to the Editor

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Dengue Crisis Escalates in Peru in 2024: A Call for Immediate Action

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Abstract

The escalating dengue crisis in Peru demands immediate action from global health organizations, health care authorities, and government officials. Endemic to Peru, dengue has seen a drastic increase in cases, with the largest outbreak on record occurring in the first half of 2023, resulting in 139 366 confirmed cases and 381 deaths. Despite efforts to contain the outbreak through integrated surveillance and response strategies, the crisis worsened in 2024 due to drastic climate changes, exacerbating conditions for dengue transmission. Heavy rains since December 2023 have caused flooding and landslides, creating ideal breeding grounds for dengue vectors. Overwhelmed local authorities, especially in areas with limited access to public services due to floods and landslides, struggle to manage the crisis. With more than half the population at risk of dengue infection, urgent measures are required to control the spread of dengue and mitigate increasing mortality rates. Targeted interventions in areas with limited health care access are crucial, considering underreporting and limitations of health systems, to accurately assess the true burden of the disease and prevent further escalation of the crisis.

Dengue, a mosquito-borne viral disease, is endemic to Peru, with the annual number of cases ranging between 4698 and 68 290 from 2017–2022. But only in the first half of 2023, 139 366 confirmed dengue cases, including 381 mortalities, were reported, making this the largest dengue outbreak on record in Peru.¹ It is reported that hospitals in the worst affected regions did not have enough beds for the surge in patient admissions. The authorities struggled to contain the outbreak and Peru's minister for health stepped down, causing further turmoil in the country.²

Discussion

The Ministry of Health of Peru, in collaboration with regional health offices and international partners, implemented a broad, integrated surveillance and response strategy, including increased targeted larvicidal treatments of standing water and insecticide spraying in affected neighborhoods¹ to control the spread of disease, but the conditions only worsened in 2024 due to drastic climate change. Since December 1 2023, the impact of heavy rains has caused flooding, landslides, and hailstorms throughout the country. The accumulation of water from the rains creates a breeding ground for dengue. According to UNICEF, the rise of dengue among the population led the Ministry of Health to declare a Health Emergency on February 28, 2024, as the number of cases more than doubled this year than in 2023. Children and adolescents infected with dengue were more than 10 000, representing 29.6% of the infected population and 13.6% of the deaths.³ This rapidly worsening crisis is out of control of the already overwhelmed local authorities, as claimed by the government officials, especially in the areas with limited access to public services owing to floods and subsequent landsliding.⁵

Conclusions

Due to the catastrophic effects of El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), more than half the population of Peru is at risk of dengue infection.⁴ World organizations, health care authorities, and government officials should take emergency measures to control the spread of dengue and check the increasing mortality rates in Peru. Furthermore, the areas with limited access to health care should be targeted and health care operations should be facilitated there. Despite the alarming figures, this is likely an underestimate of the real prevalence and burden of the disease, given the underreporting, misclassification, and limitations of the health systems in some countries.⁵

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