

PUERTO RICO REJECTS INSECTICIDE TO FIGHT ZIKA AMID PROTESTS

USE OF NALED IS RAISING CONCERNS ABOUT ITS POTENTIAL EFFECTS

SAN JUAN: Puerto Rico's governor announced Friday that he will not authorize aerial spraying with the insecticide naled to fight an increase in Zika cases as US health officials have urged. Instead, Gov Alejandro Garcia Padilla said he will support the spraying of Bti, an organic larvicide. He said it should be sufficient to fight the mosquito-borne virus along with other ongoing efforts, but hoped no child would be "born with congenital defects because of the decision I took."

Zika can cause microcephaly, a rare defect in which babies are born with abnormally small heads and brain damage. Puerto Ricans in recent weeks have organized several protests against the use of naled, raising concerns about its potential effects on people and wildlife. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently said Puerto Rico lacked an integrated mosquito control program as it fights what it called a silent epidemic. Eight of 10 people show no symptoms of Zika, which can cause symptoms including fever, rash and headache.

So far, Puerto Rico has 5,582 Zika cases and is seeing a 20-30 percent weekly increase in those cases, said Health Secretary Ana Rius. There are 662 pregnant women infected with Zika, and up to 80 of them have given birth, all to healthy babies, she said. However, Puerto Rico in May reported the first microcephaly case acquired on US soil. It involved a fetus that a woman turned over to US health officials who found it tested positive for Zika.

'Not a joke'

One death has been reported and 65 people have been hospitalized in connection with the virus. There are also 21 cases of a temporary paralysis condition known as Guillain-Barre that has been linked to Zika. "This illness is not a joke," said Rius, who originally recommended spraying with naled but later withdrew her support. Garcia's administration has fought the virus in part by fumigating public housing units where pregnant women live, distributing about 1 million condoms and picking up more than 1.65 million old tires to cut down on breeding sites.

Garcia's announcement on Friday follows a rift between his administration and the CDC, which angered local government officials by sending a shipment of naled to the US territory this week without notifying them. Garcia said he ordered the shipment returned. "This is our island," he said in a nod to angry Puerto Ricans who accused the federal government of threatening the island's political autonomy.

The CDC addressed that issue in a Friday statement. "We regret that the shipment of naled arrived in Puerto Rico without appropriate levels of awareness," the agency said. "We moved too quickly in our urgency to do all that we could to be responsive and prepared in the event officials in Puerto Rico decided to use naled." The CDC said it respected the governor's decision to not use naled.

A spokeswoman said the agency would discuss with Puerto Rico officials the best way to protect pregnant



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, Puerto Rico Gov. Alejandro Garcia Padilla testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, before the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Puerto Rico's fiscal problems. — AP

women from Zika, but officials did not specifically say whether they believed the larvicide Bti would be sufficient to fight the virus. The agency has estimated that more than 20 percent of Puerto Rico's 3.5 million people could be infected with Zika in an outbreak expected to peak by this summer. Local health officials have dismissed that number as exaggerated. — AP



UTAH: The shore at Utah Lake near American Fork, Utah. — AP

TOXIC ALGAE BLOOM SWARMS UTAH LAKE, SEEPS INTO FARM SUPPLY

SPANISH FORK, Utah: A huge toxic algae bloom in Utah has closed one of the largest freshwater lakes west of the Mississippi River, sickening more than 100 people and leaving farmers scrambling for clean water for days during the hottest part of the year. The bacteria commonly known as blue-green algae has spread rapidly to cover almost all of 150-square-mile Utah Lake, turning the water bright, anti-freeze green with a pea soup texture and leaving scummy foam along the shore. "It smells like something is rotting," said Jason Garrett, water quality director for the Utah County Health Department. "We don't have an idea of how long this event will last."

Toxic algae is a problem around the country. An enormous outbreak in Florida is now fouling beaches on the Atlantic coast, and a 2014 outbreak at Lake Erie left more than 400,000 people in the Toledo area without tap water for two days. Utah Lake doesn't provide drinking water, but its closure has caused big problems for people who use the lake for swimming, fishing and other activities and for farmers with thirsty crops. Utah Poison Control says it has fielded hundreds of calls related to the bloom, including some 130 involving people who have reported vomiting, diarrhea, headache and rashes.

The contamination spread to the Jordan River, which supplies irrigation water to dozens of farmers around Salt Lake City, about 45 miles north of the lake. The problem occurred amid days of triple-digit temperatures as growers prepare for farmers markets and try to nurture crops such as corn and fruit trees at key points in their development. "We've spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on this crop, maxed out every dollar we have," said Luke Petersen, who farms about 100 acres of tomatoes, summer squash and other produce in Riverton. "We're real worried about it."

A real hit

Farmers got some relief on Friday after the state lifted a week-long advisory against using the water for food production. Officials cited new test results that show lower-than-feared levels of dangerous toxins produced by the bacteria. Meanwhile, the Bonneville School of Sailing has had to cancel more than a dozen groups since the lake was closed. "This will be a real hit," said co-owner Todd Frye. He loves the mountain-rimmed lake and has worked to change the decades-old perception that it's murky and polluted.

New efforts to clean out bottom-feeding carp are improving the water quality, but he worries the algae bloom will be a blow to its image. The lake is largely fed by treated wastewater as well as agricultural runoff, said Erica Gaddis, assistant director for the Utah Division of Water Quality. Longstanding drought conditions have made the water especially low and stagnant. Combine that with hot summer weather and Utah Lake became a perfect petri dish for the cyanobacteria. There are chemical and biological treatments for the problem, but using them on such a large bloom would be unprecedented and possibly harmful, Gaddis said. For now, authorities are waiting for the bloom to run its course and clear, hopefully aided by a drop in temperatures or a storm that could stir up the water and reduce stagnation.

To stave off new blooms in coming years, the state is looking to reduce the levels of toxic algae-feeding phosphorous and nitrogen in wastewater that's pumped into the lake. That could be difficult, however, because cities served by those plants include some of the fastest-growing in the nation. "We've been loading the Utah Lake in one form or another for 150 years, and it's catching up with us," Gaddis said. — AP

HAWAII HEALTH AGENCY FACES MAJOR CHALLENGE IN HEPATITIS A OUTBREAK

HONOLULU: Frustrated Hawaii health officials say they have faced a number of challenges trying to identify the source of a hepatitis A outbreak that has affected at least 74 people on the island of Oahu. "It's not as feasible as a lot of people might think," state epidemiologist Dr Sarah Park said of finding the source. A major challenge has been the long incubation period of the disease, Park said. Symptoms, if there are any, can show up two to six weeks after exposure.

Hepatitis A is spread by contaminated food or water or close personal contact. Symptoms can include fever, fatigue, appetite loss, abdominal discomfort and diarrhea. Health department staff members have scrambled to interview all those who have been sickened. But they say it can be difficult for them to remember who they came into contact with or what they consumed.

"We have to sit down with each person and say look at the calendar, go back almost two months and list every single thing that passed through your mouth - food or drink or what-not - in the past 52 days," Park said. Officials have been looking for commonalities such as shopping histories among the patients, but "there's nothing really tying them together, unfortunately," Park said.

Seattle lawyer William Marler, who handles food safety litigation, said he is representing two of the Hawaii cases. Health officials have asked his clients for their purchase histories at two specific stores, he said. "The health department is starting to dig deeper to look at things that might not at the beginning look like they are promising," he said. "I'm pretty confident they'll figure this out." People with confirmed cases range from 18 to 70 and are scattered across the island.

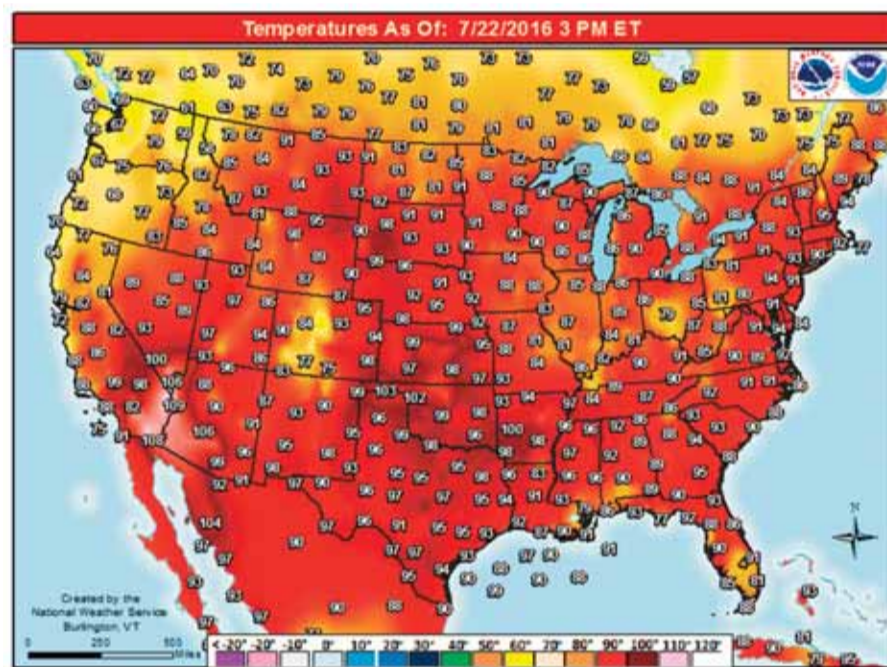
Two now live on the Big Island and Maui but were on Oahu during their exposure period, the health department said. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Thursday officials aren't aware of any other outbreaks in the nation or cases that may be connected to Hawaii's outbreak. In 2014, there were an estimated 2,500 acute hepatitis A infections in the US, according to the CDC. Fortunately, there's an effective vaccine, said Dr Monique Foster of the CDC's division of viral hepatitis.

All the Oahu cases involve adults - a good sign that children are being vaccinated, Park said. Hepatitis A can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting months. It's usually spread when a person ingests

contaminated fecal matter. Investigating the outbreak has been taxing on health department personnel, and it's possible they may never be able to track down the source, Park said. "We understand the public's frustration because we feel it, too," she said. — AP



HONOLULU: In this file photo, Dr Sarah Park, deputy chief of the Hawaii Health Department's disease outbreak and control division speaks about the potential bird flu pandemic, at the Honolulu International Airport. — AP



WASHINGTON: This image provided by the National Weather Service shows temperatures in the continental United States as of 3 pm on Friday. — AP

'MERCILESS' HEAT, HUMIDITY STICKS TO NEARLY ALL OF US

WASHINGTON: Call it the United Sweats of America. A heat wave spreading across the country is leaving few places to hide. Not even the cool of night. By Friday afternoon, all but one of the Lower 48 states had hit 90 degrees somewhere, with only Washington around for cooler comfort. For much of the country, it was expected to get even worse over the weekend. "It's just day after day. Merciless," said Jeff Masters, meteorology director of the private Weather Underground. "We don't often see this much of the country this hot for this length of time."

And while the extra hot weather will ease a bit next week for good chunks of the country, the temperature forecast for the next three months isn't exactly promising, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. For the first time in more than 20 years, the Climate Prediction Center map is shades of one color: orange for above normal temperatures. The map usually varies, showing places where there is a greater chance for above or below normal temperatures or equal chances. But the outlook for August, September and October is for above normal everywhere.

Center climate scientist Dan Collins said the center's archives go back to 1995 and they've never seen this for the entire United States - including Alaska and Hawaii. That doesn't mean a three-month heat wave, just on average warmer than normal temperatures through October. "Unusual indeed," Collins said. "But maybe less so as the years pass." Scientists haven't calculated if man-made global warming from the burning of fossil fuels

is a factor in the current heat wave, but said it has been a factor in most recent ones and a good chance here, too.

What's happening now is a ridge of high pressure has just spread over almost the entire United States. That keeps clouds and cooling away, and just pushes warm air down. Add to that the humidity, which makes everything feel stickier. It's coming with warmer ocean water, especially from a hotter-than-normal Gulf of Mexico, Masters said. The high heat and humidity will move from the Corn Belt toward the Southeast over the weekend, according to the National Weather Service.

On Monday, the weather service forecasts that nearly all of the Lower 48 states could hit 95 on the heat index, which factors in humidity. And about 30 states are forecast to hit 100. The high temperature averaged for the Lower 48 states was 92 degrees on both Thursday and Friday, the warmest since June of 2012, said meteorologist Ryan Maue of the private Weather Bell Analytics service. Not even the cool of night is helping because temperatures aren't dropping as much as they normally do.

That's a health issue because the human body relies on the evening coolness for relief, said Greg Carbin, a forecast chief for the weather service's Weather Prediction Center. Heat waves like this one "are kinda like the home run statistic in steroid-fueled baseball," University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd said in an email. "Sure heat waves always happened naturally (like home runs in baseball) but the statistics are shifting to make them more likely and more frequent within a warmer background climate." — AP

LATIN AMERICA GROUP CONDEMNS MEDICINE SCARCITY IN VENEZUELA

WASHINGTON: The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) on Friday decried the dire shortages of food and medicine in Venezuela, calling on officials in Caracas to undertake "urgent measures" to try to stem the crisis. The Washington DC-based group "regrets the urgent situation of extreme scarcity and shortages of medicine, medical supplies and food in Venezuela," it said in a statement.

"This situation has led to a significant deterioration in living conditions in the country and an increase in violence, which results in harm to people's health, personal integrity and life, to the detriment of the rights protected by the inter-American and universal human rights instruments," the commission, an autonomous human rights arm of the Organization of American States, added. The ongoing crisis "has a negative

impact on conditions to guarantee that Venezuelans can live a life of dignity, and it urges the State to adopt comprehensive measures to overcome this crisis," the IACHR said.

Among the hardships created by the shortages in medical care and supplies are "a significant number of neonatal deaths" and "long waits for critical surgical interventions," it added. With respect to food scarcity, the group expressed concern that for many Venezuelans "it is impossible to obtain access to the food needed for an adequate diet." Venezuela's economy is reeling from the global crash in the price of oil, its main export. The plunge in crude revenues has unleashed a deep recession, chronic shortages and hyperinflation, threatening 17 years of socialist rule under President Nicolas Maduro and his late predecessor, Hugo Chavez. — AFP



JAKARTA: In this photo, an Indonesian health official gives a drop of polio vaccine to a baby during a revaccination program for children who were earlier given fake vaccines, at a community health center in Jakarta, Indonesia. — AP

INDONESIAN VACCINE SCANDAL HIGHLIGHTS HEALTH SYSTEM WOES

JAKARTA: A scandal over fake vaccines given to children prompted angry and confused parents to physically attack a doctor in the Indonesian capital in a sign of deep-seated problems in the country's health system. Since last month, vials filled with saline solution and antibiotics have been discovered at 37 hospitals and clinics in nine cities, according to the Food and Drug Agency. So far, 23 people have been arrested, including three doctors.

The number of affected children is still being investigated but could be significant in a country of more than 250 million people. Indonesia President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo this week visited a clinic where nearly 170 children were to be revaccinated. He asked for patience while police continue to investigate an "extraordinary crime" of bogus vaccines allegedly going back as far as 2003. "We are in crisis right now," said Dr. Aman Bhakti Pulungan, head of Indonesia's Pediatrician Association.

"This is a medical emergency, and we have to overcome this." He said he is not aware of any children dying as a result of not being protected against diseases they were believed to have been vaccinated against, but added it's possible some kids could have gotten sick without being detected. The fake vaccines involved a number of shots routinely given to children, including for measles, whooping cough, hepatitis and diphtheria.

The counterfeits were falsely labeled as imported brands, Pulungan said. He believes the number of children affected is likely small, given that only 1 percent of vaccines administered nationwide are imported. The government began revaccinating children this week free of charge at affected hospitals and clinics, including 14 in the capital Jakarta and its outskirts. Local television footage this week showed a mob of angry parents at Harapan Bunda Hospital in eastern Jakarta arguing with a doctor and then punching him and spitting on him before security officers broke up the brawl.

Concrete compensation

Other parents took their rage to the government, complaining to members of parliament and demanding help. Jane Soepardi, the director of Surveillance, Health Quarantine and Epidemiology at the Health Ministry said Friday the government estimates about 5,000 children from 4.8 million targeted this year for immunization, have gotten fake vaccines. "Fake vaccines

arose because there was a scarcity of vaccine a few years ago that led hospitals and clinics to look for imported vaccines," she said.

"Also because the middle class demanded imported vaccines rather than locally made," she said. She said the fakes did not contain harmful substances but it's possible the unsafe process of producing them could cause infections in children they were administered to. Health Minister Nila Moeloek has called for calm and warned parents not to panic, but distrust of the health system runs deep in a country rife with corruption, overcrowded hospitals and a lack of qualified doctors.

For those who can afford it, Singapore or Malaysia are often the first choice for treatment. Danang Susilo, the father of 14-month-old Chalea, said he is worried about his daughter's health even though doctors at Karya Medika Hospital at Bekasi on the outskirts of Jakarta assured him the fake vaccine she received was harmless. "I was shocked and very disappointed when the hospital management asked me, along with about 300 other parents to bring our children for revaccination, because the vaccine that is injected into our children turned out to be fake," he said. "How could this happen?" "We need a medical check-up, not only an explanation," he said. "We need concrete compensation."

In 2013, the Food and Drug Agency received a report from British pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline about the circulation of counterfeit vaccines bearing its name. The perpetrator was caught and fined less than \$100. Additional problems were discovered in 2014 and 2015. This year, PT Sanofi-Aventis Indonesia, a subsidiary of French pharmaceutical company Sanofi, notified the National Police about fake vaccines using its product labels, according to the agency.

Dr Kartono Mohammad, former head of the Indonesia Medical Association, said the regulations are already in place to ensure that safe vaccines are administered, but enforcement and monitoring are weak. He said that the vaccine scandal is a symptom of a much larger problem, and that the country's entire health system should be overhauled. "The attitude of the Indonesian people, especially the middle class, is that they look at the building and the facility and they say, 'This is the best hospital,'" he said. "But nobody knows if it really is a good hospital or not because there is no quality control, no quality assurance done by the government." — AP