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Information Bulletin

Dengue in the Pacific Region

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation.

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Fiji Red Cross Society staff member supporting volunteers in the dengue community clean-up at Colase settlement, Rakiraki.

Photo: Fiji Red Cross

The Situation

The IFRC's recently launched advocacy campaign 'Dengue: Turning up the volume on a silent disaster' is very timely for the Pacific, where a number of countries have been experiencing increased dengue activity or outbreaks.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the current dengue situation in the Pacific is due to the re-emergence of the **dengue virus serotype 3** after nearly 20 years, to which a large proportion of the population in the Pacific is likely to be susceptible. Dengue serotype 3 outbreaks have been occurring in Kiribati, French Polynesia and New Caledonia since the end of 2013. Currently, the number of dengue cases being reported in these countries is decreasing or low and WHO is continuing to monitor the situation closely. The number of new cases in Vanuatu has plateaued and as of 25 March there were a total of 1,440 cases and two reported deaths.

The outbreak of dengue in Fiji has resulted in 20,000 clinically suspected cases being reported and 13 deaths confirmed since December 2013, according to WHO. The Ministry of Health in Fiji has issued a FJD \$3.3 million (CHF 1.62 million) National Dengue Action Plan with focus on strengthening dengue surveillance, dengue clinical management, dengue laboratory reporting and management, strengthening the public health response, coordination and logistics for the outbreak, and improving communications. The Fijian government organised a massive four-week national clean-up campaign which took place in March and is encouraging communities and businesses to continue with the practice regularly after the campaign.

The number of new cases appears to be decreasing since the end of March, due to prevailing cooler weather, a decreasing proportion of the population susceptible to the dengue virus, and active vector control measures taken such as the national clean-up campaign.

In the Solomon Islands as of 7 April 2014, WHO reported a modest increase in dengue cases with more than 50 suspected cases since last November. The National Dengue Taskforce has been activated and surveillance and public health measures have been strengthened.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

Fiji Red Cross Society (FRCS)

FRCS, in its role as auxiliary to the Government of Fiji, offered the Ministry of Health its support and assistance to respond to the dengue outbreak. As a result the Permanent Secretary for Health urged all divisional and sub divisional medical officers to contact their local FRCS branch to work collaboratively on community advocacy, social mobilisation and community based vector reduction activities.

FRCS's activities are an integral part of the Government's National Dengue Action Plan, which was endorsed by the National Dengue Taskforce on 17 March 2014. The Action Plan aims to minimise dengue cases and fatalities while reducing the burden on the healthcare system. FRCS's key activities are to work with the Ministry of Health to enhance risk communication by delivering consistent messages about dengue fever, and to strengthen vector control response by assisting with larvicide treatment and source reduction activities.

FRCS's Dengue Plan of Action (covering March to June 2014) aims to reach a total of 75,000 beneficiaries in 137 communities via 13 branches with the support of 130 volunteers. FRCS began its activities with training for Health and Care staff on the Ministry of Health's key dengue messages, and then carried out training of trainers at branch level. For the first time in a health response, FRCS has established Emergency Operation Centres at branch level, which are aiding information management.

FRCS volunteers are provided with personal protection equipment including hand sanitizer, gloves, rubber boots and insect repellent, before being deployed to Ministry of Health identified dengue "hotspot" communities. FRCS volunteers carry out house-to-house dengue awareness messaging and promptly refer suspected cases to the nearest health facility. In addition to awareness activities, FRCS volunteers carry out larvicide treatment, take part in community clean-up activities and assist community members to recognise and destroy potential mosquito breeding grounds on their property.

FRCS Branch Health Executives coordinate and liaise with the Ministry of Health and Municipality's health inspectors at Divisional level to ensure follow-up actions are taken on the potential mosquito breeding grounds identified by FRCS volunteers. FRCS Branch Health Executives also coordinate closely with Turaga ni Koro (Head of Village), community health workers and committees to plan awareness activities in villages and settlements.

By 24 March, FRCS had trained and deployed 56 volunteers in the Western Division, who had reached 17,800 people. In addition to their community activities, FRCS volunteers assisted hospital staff at Lautoka Hospital and Sigatoka Hospital to cope with large numbers of dengue patients by establishing temporary shelters, carrying out dengue messaging, providing drinking water for patients and assisting with managing patient flow.

Solomon Islands Red Cross Society (SIRC)

Prior to the recent devastating floods, SIRC was responding to the increase in number of dengue cases with "early warning early action" activities, including dengue awareness. Since the floods there is a risk of dengue cases rising due to the increase in possible mosquito breeding sites. SIRC plans to incorporate dengue prevention messaging in hygiene promotion activities in the evacuation centres as a priority activity, and with the wider affected population.

IFRC and Other Movement Partners

IFRC Pacific Regional Office (PRO) has provided updates on dengue to Pacific National Societies and has been coordinating closely with WHO.

IFRC PRO has also been working closely with FRCS, including joint attendance at National Public Health Emergency and Disaster Management Taskforce meetings, to help with the preparation of the Dengue Plan of Action and facilitating funding support. Pledges have been received from New Zealand Red Cross and Australian Red Cross which cover 100 per cent of FRCS's Plan of Action, totalling FJD \$97,000 (CHF 46,400).

Contact information

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All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGOs\) in Disaster Relief](#) and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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The IFRC's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.