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## **Honduras: Health Ministry Requests Emergency Assistance From Pan-american Health Organization To Cope With Dengue Epidemic**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

*Category/Department: General*

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On Sept. 3, Health Minister Cesar Castellanos requested emergency assistance from the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) to fight a dengue epidemic. Although only one case of the fatal "hemorrhaging" form of dengue has been detected this year, nearly 2,400 cases of "classic" dengue have been diagnosed since January. Both forms of the disease are transmitted by "aedes aegypti" mosquitos. In June, an average 200 dengue cases were reported per week. Most victims were residents of central Honduras. Current drought conditions contribute to the spread of dengue. Streams and other bodies of water are reduced to stagnant pools, or breeding grounds for dengue-carrying mosquitos. Dr. Enrique Zelaya, director the Health Ministry's epidemiology department, said that in addition to dengue cases, in the first half of the year, health officials confirmed 18,000 cases of malaria, 2,386 of tuberculosis, 2,344 of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and 6,000 cases of sexually transmitted diseases. Zelaya said the four major causes of death in Honduras are diseases affecting the cardio-vascular system, gastro- intestinal diseases, respiratory ailments, and violence. Chronic poverty affecting 70% of Hondurans, he added, is the main cause of the nation's poor health standards. An estimated 1 million Hondurans lack access to medical care, and 75% of children suffer from malnutrition. Average annual per capita income is \$300. In statements to reporters in Tegucigalpa on Sept. 4, Carlyle Guerra de Macedo, PAHO regional director for Latin America, said that only Haiti, Bolivia, certain areas of Guatemala, and recently Nicaragua, present worse health conditions than Honduras. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 08/31/91, 09/03/91, 09/04/91; AFP, 09/04/91)

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