

Dengue fever strikes US

DENGUE fever has re-entered the US via the Florida Keys after an absence of 65 years.

The mosquito-borne virus has been identified in 28 people from Key West by the US Centers for Disease Control. The CDC announced the findings last week in its [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#).

"We don't know for sure that this hasn't happened before without being noticed," says Christopher Gregory of the CDC's [dengue branch](#) in San Juan, Puerto Rico. "It could be the tip of the iceberg."

Most cases resolve after flu-like symptoms, says Gregory. He says the best precaution is to empty standing water from potential mosquito breeding grounds, such as birdbaths.

Gregory says the blame for this dramatic rise could lie with increased travel between the US and South and Central America and the Caribbean - areas which have seen nearly 5 million cases of dengue fever from 2000 to 2007. Infected mosquitoes have also been moving northwards, thanks to [global warming](#).

Dan Epstein of the Pan American Health Organization in Washington DC is worried that these two factors could lead to outbreaks of dengue haemorrhagic fever, the most severe and lethal form of the disease, which is present in South America.

Gregory is more concerned about the potential spread of [chikungunya](#), an incurable mosquito-borne virus, that causes crippling arthritis-like symptoms. It's only a matter of time before it reaches the US, he says.