



**1 April 2009**

## **50,000 breeding sites found during Cairns dengue epidemic**

Health authorities have found more than 50,000 potential mosquito breeding sites during the current Cairns dengue epidemic, figures released today showed.

As total confirmed cases in the Far North reached 824, just four months after the Cairns outbreak was declared, it was revealed that Queensland Health mosquito control teams have inspected more than 14,000 properties in the Cairns region since 1 December last year.

Whitfield, Cairns North, Edge Hill and Manoora have been the most active suburbs during the largest Cairns dengue outbreak on record, with more than 1,000 visits from mosquito control teams for each suburb.

These inspections also revealed the type of water-holding items that have been most likely to be breeding dengue mosquitoes. These include:

- rimless tyres (32 per cent of rimless tyres found were breeding mosquitoes)
- buckets (29 per cent)
- tarps/plastic (13 per cent)
- bird baths (11 per cent)
- pot plant bases (11 per cent)
- boats (seven per cent)
- bromeliads (three per cent)
- palm fronds (three per cent).

Most prolific breeding sites in terms of number of larvae found have been (in order): tarps/plastic, buckets, bird baths, tyres and pot plant bases.

“The message is clear — you can significantly reduce the number of dengue mosquitoes in your house by keeping your yard clear of any containers capable of holding water,” said Queensland Health Senior Medical Entomologist Brian Montgomery.

“By checking your yard once a week, and removing these items, you will significantly reduce the risk of catching dengue.

“This risk can be further reduced by filling your pot plant bases with sand, and changing the water in your bird bath once a week.

“Yes, bromeliads and fallen palm fronds can breed dengue mosquitoes, but they are not as significant as the artificial containers in your yard.”

The news comes after two more Cairns suburbs have been taken off the 'dengue hotspot' list for the current epidemic.

Holloways Beach and Trinity Beach were today officially marked as no longer having recent dengue transmission, leaving 15 suburbs still active.

"There is a definite slowdown in the rate of confirmed dengue cases, but now is not the time for Cairns residents to be complacent," said Mr Montgomery.

"Local residents need to continue working with us to clear potential dengue mosquito breeding sites, and go to their doctor if they are sick with symptoms of dengue, while doctors need to continue to notify us of suspected cases.

"The recent drier weather has helped reduce adult dengue mosquito populations. However, not many people know that the dengue mosquito eggs can survive in a container for six months after the water has dried out.

"The eggs are cemented along the water-line within a container and only hatch when re-flooded. Therefore, with some rainfall, there is a risk that the number of dengue cases will increase again if residents leave these containers in their yards, thinking the dengue epidemic is slowing."

The Cairns epidemic has been particularly fast — in 2003-04, it took 69 weeks to get to 536 cases, while it took just 14 weeks to get to the same figure during the current epidemic.

**ends**

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**MEDIA ALERT: Queensland Health Senior Medical Entomologist Brian Montgomery will be available for interview at 2pm on Wednesday 1 April at Tropical Population Health Services, 19 Aplin Street, Cairns.**

**Other individual interview requests will be unable to be fulfilled, but a digital audio recording of the media conference will be available upon request. Please email [gavin\\_broomhead@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:gavin_broomhead@health.qld.gov.au) for a copy.**