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Venezuela – Ebola prevention measures and others current diseases at the country

The deadly Ebola outbreak which is causing international reaction has Latin American nations also taking actions to prevent its spreading to the region. The outbreak begun in March, but it was not until early August that the WHO declared it an “international health emergency”. Recently a researcher with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Miguel Aragon, has warned that the Americas should not underestimate the Ebola threat.

In the maritime sector, according to a press statement issued by Gen. Luis Graterol former Minister of Water and Aerial Transport (MPPTAA), from August 25th all vessels reporting any call at ports from countries declared on alert for Ebola must go first to an anchorage special zone in order to be inspected first by the Health Authority, who then will decide whether to send the vessel to a special quarantine zone or allow the vessel to continue to berth. According to sources this instruction is now in force at all ports but no other formal instruction or protocol in written form has been issued to ship agents.

Back on August 17th Dr. Edgar Rivera an official spokesmen from the Ministry of Public Health declared the risk of Ebola being spreading to Venezuela as remote, more recently on September 16th after some mortal cases of an unknown disease registered in the central State of Aragua the minister of Public Health Dra. Nancy Perez denied the existence of any case of Ebola in the country.

Despite there are no suspected or confirmed cases of the Ebola virus more worrying to the authorities and public opinion is the certain and rapid spread of the Chikungunya virus in the country. The Chikungunya virus (CHIKV) is an insect-borne virus, of the genus Alphavirus, that is spread by the Aedes mosquitoes. Chikungunya infection causes fever and severe joint pain. Other symptoms include muscle pain, headache, nausea, fatigue and rash. The disease shares some clinical signs with dengue, and can be misdiagnosed in areas where dengue is common.

The first case of this disease was reported on June 6th, just four months after on September 17th the official toll according to minister Dra. Nancy Perez is 398 cases confirmed out of 1239 under analysis, with only three deaths of patients who have had another base disease. Estimations of the number of people infected by Chikungunya vary, as new cases are constantly being reported. With the chance that the virus is mistaken as dengue, these figures are likely underestimated.

Being a virus disease there is no vaccine against the Chikungunya so the following measures are suggested:

- As per the usual advice with Dengue and Malaria the best protection for the crew members is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes during a stay in Venezuela as a Chikungunya area.
- Stay in air conditioned areas when indoors and wear protective clothing when outdoors using insect repellents on exposed skin are also indicated measures.
- The disease has an incubation period of several days so it is advised to seek immediate medical attention if suspected on board, especially if the vessel had a short time at berth will most probably be back at sea when symptoms are noticed. It is advisable then to seek assistance from agents/P&I Correspondents as a matter of urgency.

Should you need any assistance or further information regarding the topic stated above, please feel free to contact:

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