

Brazil Runs No Risk of Smallpox Epidemic, Authorities Say

Contributed by Rosamélia de Abreu
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Brazil is not running the risk of a smallpox epidemic, according to Jarbas Barbosa, secretary of Health Inspection in the Ministry of Health.

Four cases were reported recently in the states of Santa Catarina and São Paulo. According to the secretary, the disease was transmitted by a Brazilian surfer, who caught smallpox in the Maldives Islands, in Asia.

Barbosa informed that smallpox vaccine coverage in Brazil is high, which eliminates the risk of an epidemic.

"If we take preventive actions immediately, such as vaccinating everyone who had contact with the surfer, there is no risk of an epidemic. We have good vaccine coverage in Brazil, and every five years we vaccinate all children five years old or under," he affirms.

Barbosa guaranteed that the smallpox vaccine is effective and secure and is provided free to the population at health posts.

In 1997 Brazil suffered a smallpox epidemic involving over 60 thousand cases and 53 deaths. Health officials took four months to detect the disease, which was introduced by Italian tourists, and a year and a half to control the epidemic, the secretary of Health Inspection informs.

Since 2000 there have been no cases of transmission in Brazilian territory, but, since smallpox epidemics still exist in every continent except the Americas, it is important to continue surveillance and vaccination campaigns, since there is always the possibility of a foreign tourist or immigrant arriving in the country with the infection.

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