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Brief account of the situation regarding the suspected outbreak of Chikungunya fever in Sri Lanka

The Epidemiology Unit has been receiving reports about an increase in viral fever in the districts of Kalmunai, Mannar, Jaffna, Batticaloa, Puttalam & Colombo since mid-October. These patients have presented to the Government hospitals in Kalmunai, Mannar Jaffna, Batticaloa, Puttalam and to some General Practitioners in the Colombo Municipal Council area. The National Hospital of Sri Lanka has also observed an increase in the cases of viral fever during the same period.

We have already carried out investigations in the affected areas, and blood samples collected were sent to the four laboratories at Medical Research Institute (Colombo), Molecular Medicine Unit (Ragama), Gene-tech Research Institute (Colombo) and AFRIM (Bangkok, Thailand).

Out of these, the Medical Research Institute has found the samples to be negative for measles, rubella and dengue fever. Since their facilities for further analysis is limited, the samples have since been sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune, India for confirmation. On the 17th November 2006 the Molecular Medicine Unit at Ragama reported to me that they have identified Chikungunya virus from the samples of blood collected from suspected patients using PCR technique. On the same day the MRI and Gene Tech Research institute, also reported that they too identified Chikungunya virus from the samples they had received. The MRI has confirmed it by IgM ELISA & the GENE Tech has confirmed it by RT-PCR. **The National institute of virology, Pune, India and AFRIM laboratory Bangkok, Thailand have also now confirmed the identification of Chikungunya infection.**

Considering the above evidence, the Epidemiology Unit is of view that there is a strong involvement of Chikungunya virus in the current outbreak. We have already informed the relevant Ministry Officials and the Provincial authorities with regard to the control measures which are essentially the measures to control Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus by eliminating their adult mosquitoes and the breeding places and as a short term measure to educate public as much as possible to avoid mosquito bites.