

International Zika experts descend on Brazil

BY AFP

BRASÍLIA. International experts, including World Health Organisation chief Margaret Chan, are visiting Brazil this week and next to check out a major increase in Zika virus infections, which have been blamed for birth defects.

Chan, whose organisation has declared an international emergency over the mosquito-transmitted virus, is expected in Brazil on February 23-24.

Experts from the US Centers for Disease Control are already in the country and officials from two other US bodies, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health, are due to arrive, the Brazilian health ministry said.

Zika often has few symptoms, but Brazilian scientists say they have found a direct link between the virus and a serious birth defect called microcephaly in babies born to women who were infected while pregnant.

There is no vaccine for Zika and cases have shot up across Brazil and much else of the region, raising fears for local people and visitors, including during the August Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Brazilian authorities have launched a national campaign against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito which carries the virus. Military personnel have reinforced health authorities in a door to door campaign against mosquito breeding spots.