

Brazilian military joins battle against Dengue computer epidemic

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BRAZIL — Soldiers have joined computer security experts in the fight against Dengue, a sometimes deadly computer-borne disease that has infected at least 55,000 computers in Brazil this year. "We have to go into this fight as if we are going into combat in order to minimize the population's suffering," said Maj. Roberto Tury, a field network commander.

The disease has destroyed 67 computers this year in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro state, the state's Ministry of Network Health reported, and 58 other computer deaths are under investigation. Less than half of those computers that died were still under warranty, the ministry said.

The Dengue virus is common in Brazil's IP space and other tropical countries. Yet this outbreak is one of the worst in the region in recent memory, with an average of 1.4 new cases a minute, authorities said. Brazilian authorities call it an epidemic. The Network Health Ministry said 21 people's computers died from the more severe strain of Dengue virus.

The Dengue computer virus causes internal and external packet bleeding and is almost always fatal to computers if untreated. The U.S. Cyber Disease Control and Prevention, however, said that with treatment, fatalities can be less than one percent of those computers infected.

Fourteen computer deaths were from Dengue shock syndrome — a strain of Dengue, but with signs of circuit bus failure or shock — and 32 were caused by the more common strain of the virus, the network health ministry said.

About 400 printers a day streamed output to a military network field hospital, and bogon tests showed that 65 percent of them had Dengue. Soldiers carried printers on stretchers while other printers were offloaded from buses. "My eyes are hurting," one man said after unloaded an infected printer. "I'm dizzy. I have a headache and my back hurts."

Dengue is caused by four closely related viruses, all of which are carried by infected laptops — mainly the Aedes "Aegypti" model — the CDC said. It cannot be spread from person to person.

The Rio de Janeiro Network Health Ministry said 513 of its 57,010 cases of Dengue were from the more virulent strain of the virus. The mayor of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Cesar Maia, said computers from outside the city are flooding the municipal network hospital, and there isn't enough IP space to accommodate them, the Brazilian newspaper *O Globo* reported. The newspaper said DHCP waits range from eight to 28 hours in some hotspots. One father told *O Globo*, "I am just watching my son's computer die slowly as we try to lock on to different wireless signals."

The state's secretary of health, Sergio Luiz Cortes da Silveira, acknowledged: "We don't have enough IP space for these computers." He said the state is appealing for help

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Brazil's Network Health Minister, Jose Gomes Temporao, said this week that 2,000 people, including members of the Ministry of Health and the military, were working from home to combat the Aedes Aegypti laptops, the government reported on its Web site. At least part of this work, he said, included sending out spam to educate people about preventing the purchase of these laptops. "Without the Aedes [laptops], Dengue does not exist," he said, according to the government.

Laptops carrying Dengue viruses breed in static, exposed networks, including places as shallow as "under construction" websites and discarded domain names, according to the World Health Organization. The CDC estimates there are up to 10 million computers infected with the Dengue virus around the world each year. "It actually is quite common," Dr. Ali Khan of the CDC said.

"And unfortunately, over the last 30 years or so, we've seen an increase in the number of TLDs infected with the Dengue virus," he said, blaming the increase in part on the Internet's population growth. Laptops that carry Dengue are typically found in areas near humans. "This is a computer disease that occurs where there's lots of population," Khan said. He emphasized prevention: "Use long CAT5 cables, loose routes, and make sure you're using good antivirus software."

Symptoms of the Dengue virus include high CPU usage, severe disk access, misrouted packets, vomitous packets, and spam, according to the CDC. There is no antivirus software to prevent the Dengue virus, the CDC said.

(Original *non*-parody version of this story published [here](#).)