

**CHIKUNGUNYA**

# Experts gear up to produce local vaccine

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Health experts are gearing up to mass produce a vaccine for the mosquito-borne chikungunya disease which has become common in the South.

Candidate seed viruses of the African strain were derived from an outbreak site in Pattani and kept at a virus bank in case of emergency. The next step was to check the stability of the genetic sequence of the chikungunya strain in preparation for vaccine research and development, said Sutee Yoksan, director of the Centre for Vaccine Development at Mahidol University.

"When the country needs the vaccine against chikungunya, we do not have to wait for others to invest in research and development," the expert on dengue vaccine development said.

"We can produce large quantities of the vaccine in a short time on our own."

The mosquito-borne disease re-emerged in the Indian Ocean area in

2007 and is related to the eastern, central and southern African strains which spread more easily and rapidly than the Asian viral strain which previously was dormant.

Epidemiologists and scientists are concerned the frequency of chikungunya outbreaks could spread to suburban areas as dengue was being better controlled in urban areas.

A total of 1,565 cases of chikungunya were reported last year in Thailand. The disease has spread to 32 provinces, particularly in the South where the highest number of infections — at 45.69 per 100,000 people — was reported in Phatthalung and 32.9 per 100,000 in Nakhon Si Thammarat. No deaths have been reported, the Bureau of Epidemiology said.

Dr Sutee is also developing a vaccine which could prevent the four serotypes of dengue. The project is part of a joint effort involving the Public Health Ministry and the university to produce a dengue vaccine by 2015 and other vaccines for Japanese encephalitis, tuberculosis and diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus.

The director-general of the Department of Disease Control, Manit Teerantakanon, said the National Institute of Vaccines had been established in a bid to support vaccine research and development, reduce import costs and improve manufacturing practices for local vaccines.