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## FEATURED Q&A

# Will Vaccines Halt Dengue's Spread in the Region?



The number of cases of dengue fever, spread by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, has increased dramatically in recent years. // File Photo: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Q** Mexican health authorities on Dec. 9 approved Dengvaxia, the world's first dengue vaccine to win government approval. France-based Sanofi said it developed the vaccine over a period of 20 years. How significant of a development is the vaccine for public health in Latin America? How easy will it be to get the vaccine into the hands of populations that need it in Mexico? Will other countries be using it on a widespread basis soon? How will the Mexican government ensure that the vaccine is delivered to those most in need? To what extent do government regulations and market forces encourage or discourage the development and dissemination of needed vaccines?

**A** Katherine E. Bliss, senior associate at the Global Health Policy Center at the Center for Strategic and International Studies: "Dengue fever, transmitted by mosquitoes of the *Aedes aegypti* species, represents a growing public health challenge in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the number of cases increased five-fold between 2003 and 2013, and by mid-December 2015, more than 530,000 laboratory-confirmed cases of the vector-borne disease, and 1,084 dengue-associated deaths, had been reported. The vast majority of cases—465,153—have been reported in Brazil, but the 25,625 confirmed cases in Mexico this year raise concerns for public health experts, who estimate that treating dengue, which can cause high fever and joint pain and, in severe cases, hemorrhage and death, costs as much as \$328 million annually. The decision earlier this month by Mexico's Federal

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Venezuelan Lawmakers Give Initial Approval to New Court Justices

The country's lame-duck National Assembly gave initial approval to new Supreme Court justices at the same time the opposition said the ruling party filed a challenge with the court against the election of 22 opposition legislators.

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### BUSINESS

## Enel Green Power Begins Building Chile Wind Farm

The construction of the 112 megawatt wind farm is underway in the country's Antofagasta region.

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### POLITICAL

## Santos Signs Decree Allowing Medical Marijuana

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said allowing medical use of the drug does not weaken the government's resolve to fight narcotics trafficking. The government does not plan to legalize marijuana's recreational use.

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Santos // File Photo: Colombian Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Venezuelan Assembly Gives Initial Approval to New Court Justices

Venezuela's National Assembly, which is still in the hands of President Nicolás Maduro's party until the opposition is scheduled to take control of it in two weeks, on Tuesday gave initial approval to 13 new Supreme Court justices in what the opposition called an effort to undermine its overwhelming victory in the country's legislative elections, the Associated Press reported. At the same time, the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable, or MUD, coalition told reporters that Maduro's party had filed a challenge with the Supreme Court against 22 legislators who were elected on Dec. 6, Agence France-Presse reported. "These are not representatives of the MUD, they are representatives of the people," said coalition spokesman Jesús Torrealba. "We say without hesitation that what we are facing here is an attempted procedural coup against the will of the people expressed clearly and decisively on Dec. 6." However, the

Supreme Court said in a statement that it had not received any such challenge from Maduro's party, the AP reported. In the election, the opposition won 112 of the National Assembly's 167 seats, giving Maduro's opponents a critical two-thirds supermajority, giving them broad powers. Late Tuesday, while lawmakers gave initial approval to new Supreme Court justices, they did not muster enough votes for final approval, leading to two more debates scheduled for today, said the assembly's president, Diosdado Cabello. [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) about Venezuela's incoming National Assembly in Monday's Advisor.]

## Colombia's Santos Approves Use of Medical Marijuana

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos on Tuesday approved a decree to legalize the use of marijuana for medical purposes. The change in the law represents a major step that puts Colombia "at the vanguard and forefront of the fight against illnesses," Santos said in signing the decree, the Associated Press reported. As

## NEWS BRIEFS

## At Least 30 Injured in Blast Near Mexico Gas Pipeline

At least 30 people have been wounded in an explosion that happened late Tuesday near a gas pipeline in Mexico's southern state of Tabasco, the Voice of America reported. State-owned oil company Pemex said the blast came from a stolen fuel tank and that the pipeline itself did not explode. The incident happened in a residential section of the city of Cárdenas.

## Brazilian Legislator Recommends Approval of Disputed Rousseff Budget

In a move that could undermine opposition efforts to impeach President Dilma Rousseff, a key member of Brazil's congressional budget committee on Tuesday recommended the approval of the controversial 2014 budget accounts that are at the core of the impeachment case, Reuters reported. Should the committee agree with Senator Acir Gurgacz and approve the accounts, the impeachment process could lose its grounds for seeking Rousseff's removal. Rousseff's governing coalition has a majority of the seats on the committee, which is expected to follow Gurgacz's lead.

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Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS) to approve the sale of Sanofi Pasteur's Dengvaxia to prevent dengue reflects the government's recognition of the social and economic threat dengue poses. But Mexico's health secretary has not yet approved Dengvaxia for use in the public institutions where the majority of dengue patients seek treatment. In Mexico, as in other affected countries, reaching the populations that could benefit most from a vaccine will mean making it available through the public programs that serve the poorest and most vulnerable citizens. In the Americas, the PAHO Revolving Fund provides vaccines at low cost to public programs in member countries and could eventually play a role in helping disseminate Dengvaxia, or a different dengue vaccine, should countries request it."



**Meredith Fensom, consultant at the World Bank and policy advisor at the Americas Health**

**Foundation:** "More than 50 million cases of dengue fever occur globally each year, and more than half of the reported cases come from Latin America. The world's first dengue vaccine to win regulatory approval is a significant development for public health in the region and beyond. Dengue's prevalence varies throughout Latin America. Six countries—Venezuela, Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia, Honduras and Mexico—account for more than 75 percent of all cases in the region. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates dengue's economic burden in the Americas at \$2.1 billion annually. The successful integration of a vaccine, coupled with continued vector-control efforts, could greatly improve

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## Ecuador Gets 18 Percent Discount on Award to Occidental: Correa

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa on Tuesday said his government had obtained a discount of at least 18 percent on compensation that an arbitration tribunal required it to pay for seizing Occidental Petroleum's assets in the Andean nation a decade ago, Reuters reported. The International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes had awarded Occidental \$1.77 billion in the case, but the tribunal last month cut the award by 40 percent, and Correa said negotiations appear to have reduced the amount due by a further 18 percent.

many as 400,000 Colombians suffering from diseases such as epilepsy could benefit from the move, according to advocates of allowing the use of medical marijuana. Under current law, Colombians may possess as much as 20

**The move will put Colombia “at the vanguard and forefront of the fight against illnesses,” said Santos.**

grams of marijuana or 20 marijuana plants for personal use, and a study recently showed that most Colombians have tried the drug at least once, Reuters reported. Some companies, including ones based outside Colombia, are interested in producing and selling marijuana in the South American country, but the government has no plans to legalize the drug for commercial sale or recreational use, the wire service reported. Santos said legalizing medical marijuana does not weaken the government’s resolve to fight illegal drugs and drug trafficking, though critics see Santos’ positions on drug policy as a softening of the government’s position.

## BUSINESS NEWS

### Enel Green Power Starts Building Chilean Wind Farm

Italy-based Enel Green Power said Tuesday it has started construction of a 112 MW wind farm in Chile’s Antofagasta region that will require investment totaling \$215 million, EFE reported. The Sierra Gorda wind farm, scheduled to come online in late 2016, is expected to generate 295 GW annually, the equivalent of enough energy to meet the annual electricity needs of about 130,000 households. The electricity generated will be sold under a long-term power purchase agreement with Chile’s

Sistema Interconectado del Norte Grande. President Michelle Bachelet has put in place a plan to generate more than 40 percent of Chile’s new electrical capacity from renewable sources such as wind, solar, geothermal and biomass, setting a goal to reach 20 percent of total national energy supply with clean sources power by 2020. Non-conventional renewable energy sources have grown steadily in Chile in recent years and now represent 9.2 percent

of the total energy produced in the country, Kathleen Barclay, principal of Asesorías KCB in Santiago, told the Advisor in August. However, record-low prices for hydrocarbons have raised questions over whether natural gas or other currently cheap sources of power could delay reaching those goals. [Editor’s note: See [“Is Chile Reversing Plans to Use More Renewable Energy?”](#) in the Aug. 7 edition of the weekly Energy Advisor.]

## COMINGS & GOINGS

### Petrobras Board Elects New Senior Executives

The board of directors of Brazilian state oil company Petrobras last Friday elected Director Luiz Nelson Guedes de Carvalho to the post of chairman, with a term of office to run until Jan. 1. Guedes de Carvalho had been acting as interim chairman since Sept. 14, when then-chairman Murilo Ferreira stepped down to deal with the implications of a catastrophic accident at a joint venture of mining giant Vale, where he serves as chief executive. The board also promoted Antônio Sergio Oliveira Santana, the executive manager of human resources, to be director of services and corporate affairs, a position that he was already occupying on an interim basis. He has worked at Petrobras for 38 years in various managerial positions.

### Arnold & Porter’s Di Rosa, Huebner Nominated for ICSID Panel of Arbitrators

U.S. President Barack Obama has announced his intent to appoint attorneys Paolo Di Rosa and David Huebner, a former U.S. ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa, as members of the Panel of Arbitrators of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, or ICSID, Arnold & Porter said in a statement Monday. ICSID is an autonomous international institution affiliated with the World Bank. Last year, Arnold & Porter’s Jean Kalicki was appointed to the ICSID Panel of Arbitrators.



Huebner // File Photo: U.S. State Department.

### Match Names Ramachandran as Chief Executive Officer for Asia/Latin America

Match, the dating company that had a \$500 million initial public offering on Wall Street last month, on Tuesday named Navin Ramachandran as its new CEO for Match Group Asia/Latin America. Ramachandran will retain duties in his previous role as Match’s chief operating officer. The company’s net income for 2014 was \$148.4 million, up 18 percent year-over-year, The Wall Street Journal reported.

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public health outcomes in the region. In Mexico, Sanofi's regulatory approval for the vaccine covers those aged 9 to 45 years in areas that are highly endemic and paves the way for the world's first immunization program against the virus. Pricing and delivery of the vaccine are critical questions that remain. However, Mexico has high coverage rates for its vaccines and valuable experience delivering vaccines to the population. According to Sanofi, the company is committed to launching their vaccine where dengue is endemic and by the end of this year expects to have applied for approval in about 20 countries. Panama, Colombia and Brazil may be approving the vaccine next in Latin America, likely in early 2016. Following registration, ministries of health in the region will face important decisions about whether and how to introduce the vaccine into national programs. Understanding the vaccine's potential economic value can help guide policymakers, public health officials and other decision makers during the vaccine's implementation."

**A** **Andrew I. Rudman, managing director at ManattJones Global Strategies:** "Mexico's first-in-the-world approval of Dengvaxia is an exciting development that reflects the pharmaceutical industry's commitment to research into neglected tropical diseases and Federal Commissioner Mikel Arriola's commitment to establishing COFEPRIS as a regional reference agency. The introduction of the vaccine will have an immediate economic and social impact on Mexico that could ultimately prevent 8,000 hospitalizations and more than 100 deaths annually while generating savings in excess of 1 billion pesos. Similar benefits should accrue to other countries in the region when the

vaccine is introduced given the more than one million reported cases of dengue in the Americas. Vaccination campaigns are an important component of prevention efforts, which health ministries increasingly recognize as an essential aspect of improving the efficiency of their healthcare systems. Mexico's vaccination campaign success may serve as a model for other countries.

“**The introduction of the vaccine will have an immediate economic and social impact on Mexico....”**

— Andrew I. Rudman

Matching demand to production capacity, especially before production reaches capacity, and negotiating appropriate pricing will require a thoughtful and collaborative approach between the manufacturer and health authorities. While not the first product to have its initial launch in Mexico, Dengvaxia may prove one of the most significant given its novelty and the globally vast potential recipient population. Because COFEPRIS' decisions are recognized by Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador and Panama, these markets would seemingly be logical choices for subsequent introduction following Mexico subject, of course, to the manufacturer's roll out strategy. With an above-average case fatality rate, Colombia could be particularly attractive."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

## LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue, Copyright © 2015

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**Latin America Advisor** is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at:

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Washington, DC 20036

**Phone:** 202-822-9002

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[www.thedialogue.org](http://www.thedialogue.org)

ISSN 2163-7962

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