

HEALTH

Companies announce partnership to release dengue-fighting mosquitoes in the Caribbean

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Two private companies announced Friday a partnership to release mosquitoes across the Caribbean bred with a bacterium that blocks the dengue virus as the region fights a record number of cases.

Orbit Services Partners Inc., a company registered in Barbados, is partnering with Verily, a San Francisco-based health technology company, for the project. The companies have been meeting with government officials in the region in hopes of launching the project early next year, said Orbit chairman Anthony Da Silva.

It would target nations including Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Maarten, St. Martin, Suriname, Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Similar projects using the Wolbachia bacterium already have been implemented [elsewhere in the world](#). Mosquitoes are infected with Wolbachia in a laboratory and then released into the wild, where they pass it on to their offspring. The bacterium prevents the dengue virus from replicating inside a mosquito's gut.

Da Silva said the partnership has been three years in the making and was delayed by the pandemic. The proposal is still pending approval in individual Caribbean nations.

The Caribbean, along with the Americas, [has reported more than 4 million dengue cases](#) so far this year, the highest number since record-keeping began in 1980.