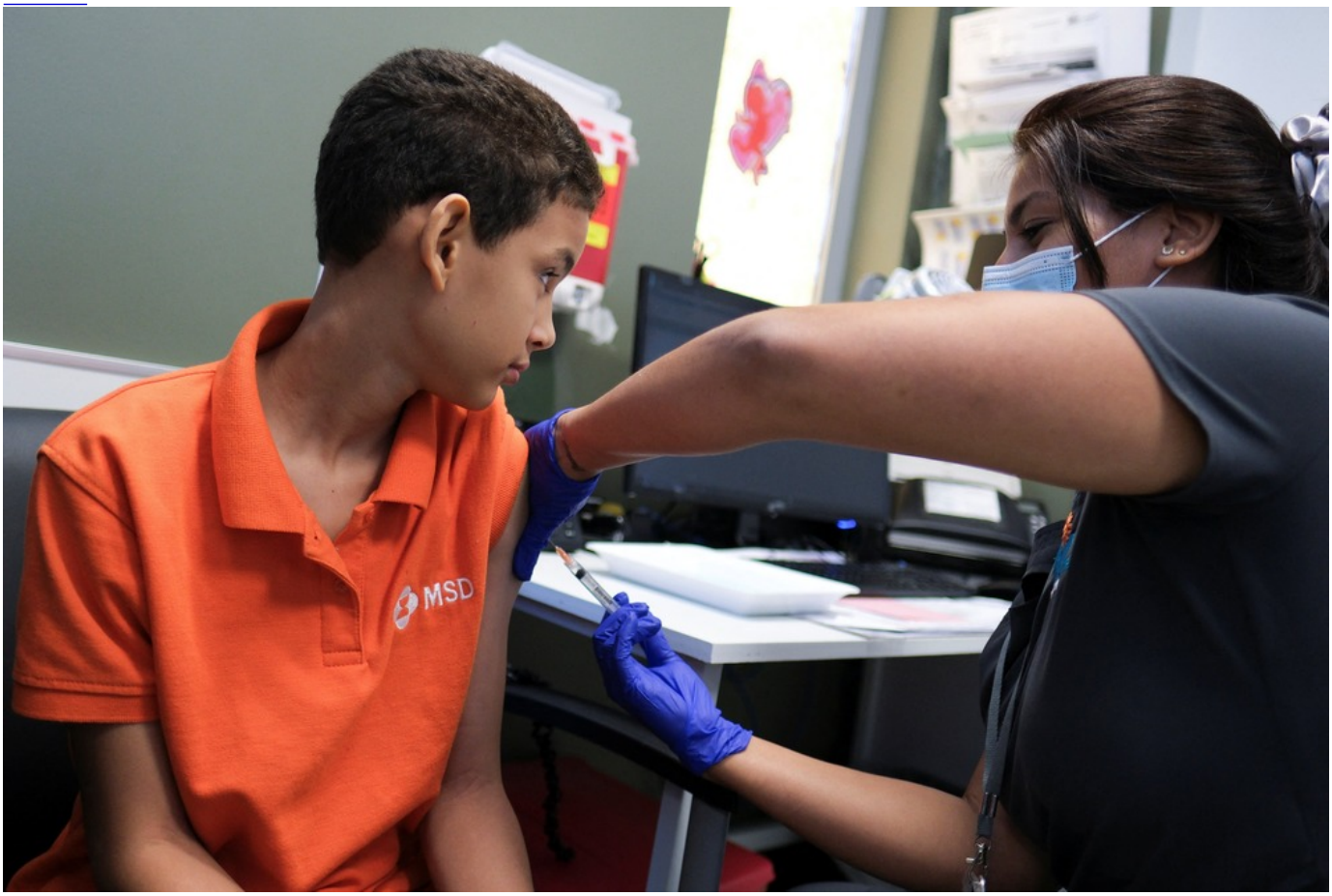
News



Kayla Feliciano, a registered nurse, injects a dose of the dengue vaccine Dengvaxia March 27, 2024, in the arm of Alberto Luis Nunez, 12, following a spike in dengue fever cases in San Juan, Puerto Rico.
(OSV News/Ricardo Arduengo, Reuters)

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San Juan, Puerto Rico — April 26, 2024

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In response to the public health emergency due to the dengue virus, Archbishop Roberto O. González Nieves of San Juan, Puerto Rico, called on the faithful to take action and "be instruments of everyone's right to health."

The archbishop made the call in a pastoral letter published April 11. Puerto Rico's secretary of the Department of Health declared the public health emergency March 25.

"This emergency declaration, in a singular way, concerns all of us in the Church," González wrote, saying that the church must respond to prevent the disease.

"We want to make ourselves available as collaborators of the Department of Health, as well as the state medical community, in this very serious matter that concerns us all, because solidarity makes us mutually responsible for protecting life," the archbishop wrote.

The letter, published in Spanish, said the faithful have a moral and pastoral duty "to be Samaritans in action," identify vulnerable populations in their parish communities and act as guarantors to ensure preventive measures are taken.

"I ask you to welcome this letter as an urgent invitation to pastoral action, to preserve our lives and those of our neighbor, to be instruments of everyone's right to health, and to make our parishes Christian communities where the Gospel is lived out," he stated. He added, citing Jesus's healing of the sick as detailed in the Gospels, that it is incumbent upon us to "help prevent, mitigate, and assist in curing this dengue illness."

The latest weekly report from the Arbovirus Surveillance System of the Division of Epidemiology and Research at Puerto Rico's Department of Health, updated April 18, said the number of dengue cases had risen to 795. This report also stated that from Jan. 1 to April 7, there were 478 hospitalizations, 42 severe cases and no fatalities

associated with the virus.

Likewise, the report warned that the regions with the highest number of cases on the island are San Juan (383), Mayagüez (107 cases) and Bayamon (98). The age groups with the highest number of cases, according to the report, are people ages 40 to 59 (157 cases), 10 to 14 (132 cases) and 15 to 19 (123 cases).

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The pastoral letter also included information about Aedes aegypti, the dengue-transmitting mosquito, as well as more details about the virus and how to prevent it, ways to identify severe dengue symptoms, and what to do in case of suspected contagion.

The prelate urged the general population to be vigilant and help those suffering from dengue. "You can assist them in various ways, such as eliminating breeding grounds, providing for their food, their medication, being their guardian angels and caregivers, and, if necessary, seeking medical services."

The archbishop cautioned archdiocesan offices, parishes and schools not to let their guard down and to take joint action in raising awareness about the disease and reporting positive cases to health authorities. He also made available to the government the archdiocesan communication channels to disseminate official information amid this health crisis.

"The evangelical experience reminds us of the importance and responsibility of caring for our health and that of our families. The principle of solidarity calls us to be responsible for the well-being of our neighbor," González wrote.

"Always the poorest among the poor, the most vulnerable in society, suffer the worst consequences of these epidemics,' he continued. "Divine Mercy asks us to always keep in mind the suffering flesh of Christ present in the poor, in those who suffer, in children, also in the abandoned and sick. For them, the scourge is twice as bad."

He concluded his letter by invoking "the maternal protection of Mary, Salus infirmorum, so that she may serve as an example to us that our place in the face of the pain of her sons and daughters is at the foot of the cross."