Dengue fever kills man who returned from Bangladesh

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HOUSTON (AP) - Dengue has claimed the state's first fatality this year.

A Harris County man died Monday night of dengue hemorrhagic fever, becoming the first death for 2000 in Texas from the mosquito-borne virus, a city health official said.

"He had multiple-organ failure," Kathy Barton, a spokeswoman for the Houston Department of Health and Human Services, told the Houston Chronicle in Friday's editions. "It was a misery."

Because of the man's travel history and the disease's seven- to 14-day incubation period, "there's no doubt he did not get it in this country," said Kevin Johnson, an epidemiologist with the Harris County Health Department.

Dengue is not spread by human contact or by airborne particles. The man was returning from Bangladesh, via London, when he began showing symptoms aboard a Continental Airlines flight that landed in Houston on July 24.

Authorities at Bush Intercontinental Airport notified Houston health officials of a passenger who was suspected of having meningococcal meningitis. Meningococcal disease, which causes swelling of the membranes of the spinal cord and brain, is contagious and has a high fatality rate.

After the flight landed, the patient and crew remained on the plane for less than an hour while a Continental doctor examined the man, Barton said.

The doctor determined the patient, who had a fever, did not have meningitis and cleared him to leave the plane to see his own physician, Barton said. The city determined at the time that the episode posed no health risk to the crew or passengers.

There have been two nonfatal cases of dengue this year, according to the Texas Department of Health. The first patient was a Louisiana man treated in Houston who had traveled to South America. A second patient lives in Austin and had traveled to Puerto Rico.

A South Texas girl died from dengue hemorrhagic fever in December, the first dengue death in the state in decades. The state health department believes she contracted the illness during a visit to Mexico.

In August of last year, there were 51 dengue cases confirmed by the state health department, 16 contracted in South Texas. Other cases are believed to have been contracted in Mexico or Brazil.

Some dengue-positive mosquitoes were trapped earlier this year in the Rio Grande Valley, said Kevin Johnson, an epidemiologist at Harris County Health Department.