Climate-change research to examine human health

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The effects of climate change on health – particularly heat-related diseases such as dengue fever – will be examined as part of a research project to be announced by the Federal Government today.

Penny Wong, the Minister for Climate Change, will use a tour of Queensland mining towns this week to announce $10 million for the CSIRO and Australian National University to look at what will happen to human health as temperatures rise.

“We need to better understand the diversity of these health risks, who will be most vulnerable, and the action governments, individuals and communities can take to reduce the risks,” Senator Wong said.

“By 2020, for example, the number of heat-related deaths in our capital cities is projected to double to about 2300 a year. We are likely to see more food-safety related illness and dengue fever is likely to spread southwards.”

The announcement comes as Queensland faces the worst outbreak of dengue fever since World War II after the number of people infected with the disease rose to 192 at the weekend.

The latest outbreak hit Cairns on December 1 and then Townsville on January 5 as wet season rains created ideal breeding conditions for dengue carrier, the *aedes aegypti* mosquito. Experts have been warning that dengue fever may spread to Brisbane and the Gold Coast within the next two years.

Rising temperatures are creating ideal conditions further south as temperatures rise.

It is the first time the National Health and Medical Research Council has listed climate change in its funding guidelines.

Symptoms of dengue fever include severe headaches, muscle and joint pains, rashes and a high fever which can lead to dangerous dehydration.

Research will focus on physical and mental health issues linked to heat, extreme weather, insect-borne diseases and food safety.

The National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University and the University of Queensland’s School of Integrative Biology will lead the research, along with the CSIRO.