A BACTERIA that limits the lifespan of mosquitoes could be released in the Far North as early as this wet season.

James Cook University and University of Queensland researchers have been working on the bacterium Wolbachia, which has shown to be an effective control against the spread of dengue fever.

Wolbachia, described as a “dengue vaccine for dengue mosquitoes” dramatically shortens Aedes aegypti mosquitoes’ 30-day lifespan and destroys their ability to transmit the disease. The bacteria has proven to be so successful, it may also help control other mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and chikungunya.

JCU researcher Scott Ritchie, who has been conducting lab trials with the bacteria, hoped to soon start carrying out field tests.

“We’re hoping it may happen next wet season – maybe January or February – but we’re still trying to get final approvals,” Dr Ritchie said.

Seven Tully residents have been struck down with dengue since the beginning of the year – the first time the outbreak has occurred in the town in 20 years.

It was a stark contrast to the total of 931 cases of dengue type three confirmed in North Queensland since November 2008 – the worst epidemic in 50 years.

The epidemic was declared over in August last year.

Dr Ritchie will present a public lecture tonight describing the factors that came together to create the epidemic.

“We had hot, wet weather that maximised mosquito populations, a ‘typhoid Mary’ who unwittingly imported dengue to Cairns, and an unusually quick strain of dengue that spread like lightning,” he said.

The lecture will be held from 5pm at Rydges Esplanade Resort.

Admission is free.
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— Dr Scott Ritchie, JCU