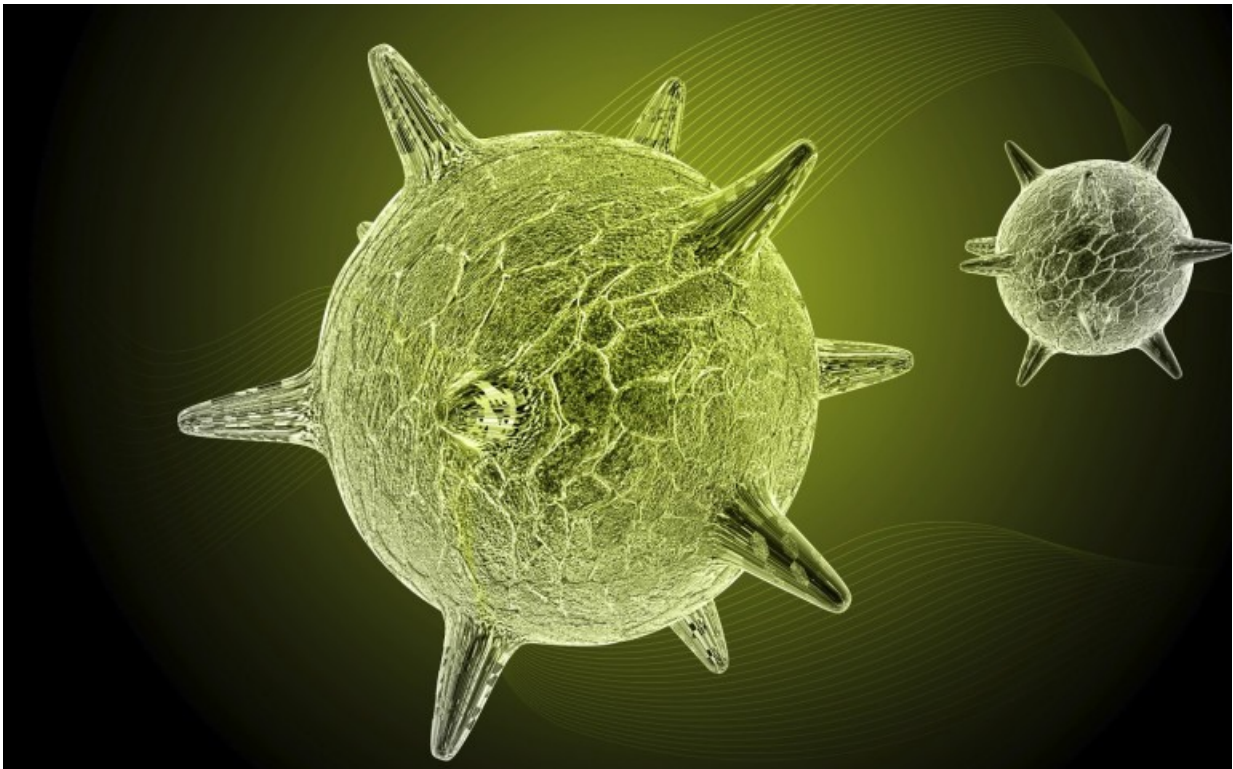


Threat of cytomegalovirus far outweighs Zika risk

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The CMV is part of the herpes family of viruses.

As the Zika virus continues to spread across the globe, and gain worldwide attention for its' potential birth defects, an NAU researcher is calling for greater public awareness of cytomegalovirus—the most common viral cause of birth defects in the United States.

Amy Armstrong-Heimsoth, assistant clinical professor of occupational therapy, began researching CMV after discovering healthcare workers abandoned patients who had the [virus](#), a trend she hopes to reduce through an awareness campaign. While CMV can be deadly for some, its risk can be mitigated by taking precautions and understanding transmission of the virus.

CMV causes an estimated 400 deaths each year and permanent disabilities in about 8,000 children, according to statistics by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"If you are practicing the correct precautions like washing your hands and a child's toys, CMV is no more contagious than anything else," said Armstrong-Heimsoth, who teaches pediatrics-related topics to NAU [occupational therapy](#) students.

CMV is primarily a concern for newborns and people with weakened immune systems, although many people who contract the virus report a mild fever or no symptoms at all. As part of the family of herpes viruses, CMV is spread through bodily fluids, including saliva.

The CDC estimates between 50 and 80 percent of adults have contracted the virus, which remains dormant in the body after infection.

"A pregnant woman can pass CMV to her child and the results can be fairly catastrophic," said Armstrong-Heimsoth, who notes just 13 percent of women have even heard of the virus. "I became aware of this when a colleague gave birth to a son with undiagnosed CMV and he now has [severe cerebral palsy](#), hearing and vision loss."

Treating a [pregnant woman](#) for CMV will lessen or prevent long term disabilities of the baby in utero. For a newborn with CMV, treatment mitigates effects but does not remove prior brain damage. There is a

three-week window after birth for diagnosing CMV, said Armstrong-Heimsoth, with a six month window for treatment.

Provided by Northern Arizona University

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