

Zika virus in the spotlight as US mosquito experts meet

February 9 2016, by Russ Bynum

The mosquitoes that spread the Zika virus are among the hardest species to fight because they live and breed in spots where water collects inside houses and yards, insect experts noted Monday at the opening of the American Mosquito Control Association's annual conference.

Experts noted that while the Zika virus that has spread rapidly in Latin America may be new to the U.S, the two mosquito species known to carry it are not.

Aedes aegypti, the mosquito blamed for the Zika outbreak linked to birth defects in Brazil, can be found in the southern U.S. from Florida to California. Another carrier is the Asian tiger mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*, which has a more northerly range that includes cities such as Chicago and New York.

U.S. mosquito fighters have already dealt with these species to prevent outbreaks of [dengue fever](#) and chikungunya virus, said Joe Conlon, the association's technical director.

"It's business as usual, because we know how to control these mosquitoes," Conlon said. "But in order to get rid of these things, you have to be very fastidious."

Some cities and counties are already taking steps to get ready before their mosquito breeding seasons begin in earnest this spring.

New Orleans' mosquito control department has lined up laboratories at Louisiana State University and Tulane University that are able to screen mosquitoes caught in surveillance traps for the Zika virus, said department director Claudia Riegel.

Harry Savage, chief entomologist with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said his best guess is that Zika infections transmitted within the U.S. will stay relatively small—much like dengue fever, which averaged 25 cases per year from 2010 to 2015—though he said he can't be sure.

Because of screened windows and air conditioning, Savage said, [mosquitoes](#) are far less likely to be found breeding inside U.S. homes than they are in Latin and Central American countries.

Still, Americans' backyards tend to offer plenty of dank breeding spots.

U.S. homeowners often aren't pleased to see mosquito control officers at their doors telling them to tidy their property, Conlon added.

"In the U.S., we don't like the government in our houses," he said.

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