

Another insect-borne virus appears in Haiti

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Infectious disease specialists say they have confirmed the Mayaro virus in a patient in Haiti.

The virus is closely related to the [chikungunya virus](#) but researchers say they do not yet know if it's caused by the same *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that's been linked to chikungunya and the Zika virus.

"Many different mosquitoes can carry the same virus," said Dr. John Lednicky, a University of Florida associate professor in the environmental and global health department of the College of Public Health and Health Professions.

Lednicky, who runs the university's laboratory in Haiti, said the Mayaro virus first was found in Trinidad and Tobago in 1954, and has been causing illnesses in South America, mainly in the Amazon region. It causes similar symptoms to chikungunya: fever, joint and muscle pain, rashes and abdominal pain.

"One can say it's as bad as chikungunya, but there is so little information available," he said. "Maybe it's been in Haiti this whole time and no one checked for it."

Whether the confirmed case signals the start of a new outbreak in the Caribbean region, researchers do not know, Lednicky said. Nor do they know if the virus is going to be widespread in Haiti where the Zika virus has been difficult to track because of the country's weak [health](#) system.

"We would like to do a lot lot more but our hands are quite tied," he said. "We would really like to help in Haiti ... and look into which mosquitoes are carrying this virus."

It was Lednicky and his team of researchers who this year announced that the Zika virus had been present in the hemisphere months before it was confirmed in Brazil in March 2015. It was in Haiti as early as 2014, they said, citing [blood samples](#) collected in December 2014. The lab had begun monitoring chikungunya fever cases after its April 2014 outbreak in Haiti and had collected blood samples from schoolchildren in the Gressier-Leogane region, southwest of Port-au-Prince, where the laboratory is located.

Lednicky said the newly found Mayaro virus is different from what they found in 2014.

"The [virus](#) we detected is genetically different from the ones that have been described recently in Brazil, and we don't know yet if it is unique to Haiti or if it is a recombinant strain from different types of Mayaro viruses," he said.

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