

Zika not likely to affect large parts of US, medical geographer says

1 February 2016, by Rachel Stern

There's no reason to suspect Zika will be much different from dengue fever, and those outbreaks in the United States have been pretty locally contained, according to Jared Aldstadt, University at Buffalo associate professor of geography in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Aldstadt's research focuses on the mosquito species that transmits Zika, [dengue fever](#), [yellow fever](#) and chikungunya.

"If you live in parts of Hawaii, Key West or on the U.S.-Mexico border, it's a concern because of the nature of the mosquito, but this is not something that is going to affect large parts of the country," he says. "This is something the U.S. can handle. Zika is limited by the mosquito and we are well protected with [air conditioning](#) and our well-built buildings.

"There is no evidence Zika will be different than dengue when it arrives occasionally in the U.S. and circulates locally for a while."

Researchers are still gathering evidence about the link between Zika and microcephaly, Aldstadt says.

"Several infections are [risk factors](#) for birth defects," he says. "There's a chance that other infections are happening, too. There are a lot of other alternatives when it comes to microcephaly."

While Aldstadt is in agreement with a travel advisory for pregnant women to be safe, there could be other risk factors at play, he says.

The mosquito that transmits Zika is a domesticated one that lives in clean water, Aldstadt says. It is not usually found in the natural environment. It was a major concern during the construction of the Panama Canal because of yellow fever, and was eradicated from much of tropical America in the 1950s.

"A place like Brazil is a perfect breeding ground for the mosquito because of the rapid urbanization and the often poor-quality housing," he says. "The risk declines significantly at the U.S. border because the better housing quality and air conditioning protects people."

Right now, places such as Brazil should be spraying indoors where the [mosquitoes](#) live, as well as removing breeding sites, such as water-holding containers, trash, tires and flower pots, Aldstadt says.

"People can protect themselves by wearing long sleeves and pants and can also use insecticide treatment," he says.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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