

Treeless tropics, more disease-carrying mosquitoes?

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Aedes aegypti mosquito, which may carry the Zika virus or dengue fever. Photo courtesy CDC.

(HealthDay)—Deforestation doesn't just strip the landscape. In tropical regions, it may also lead to more disease-carrying mosquitoes, University of Florida researchers say.

"Converting pristine tropical forests into areas for agriculture or other uses creates a habitat for the [mosquitoes](#) that transmit human diseases," lead study author Nathan Burkett-Cadena said in a university news release. He's an assistant professor of entomology.

The scientists don't say why those mosquitoes might thrive without extensive tree coverage, but they note that deforested areas are warmer and drier than similar pristine forests.

For their report, the researchers analyzed 17 studies from around the world. They found a strong link between deforestation in tropical habitats and higher concentrations of mosquitoes that carry diseases transmittable to people.

Almost 57 percent of mosquito species in deforested areas were confirmed carriers of human [disease](#), compared with about 28 percent of mosquito species in forested areas, the investigators said.

They also found that mosquito species capable of carrying multiple human diseases favored deforested habitats. These include *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, which transmit the dengue, West Nile, yellow fever and Zika viruses.

"The last couple of decades have seen an increase in efforts looking into the association between deforestation and specific diseases," said study co-author Dr. Amy Vittor.

"Here we're taking a global view, comparing the distribution of mosquito [species](#) capable of carrying disease in deforested and forested areas in the tropics," added Vittor, an assistant professor in the division of [infectious diseases](#) and global medicine.

The findings were published recently in the journal *Basic and Applied Ecology*.

More information: The World Health Organization has more on [mosquito-borne diseases](#).

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