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Experts Admit Zika Threat Fraud

Par Dr. Mercola
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We're in the midst of prime mosquito season for much of the U.S. While the exact beginning and end of mosquito season are debatable, The Washington Post recently used Google search data to pinpoint the shape of mosquito season in the U.S.1

Presumably, Google searchers for mosquitoes increase as mosquitoes ramp up their activity in any given area. Using this premise, The Washington Post found that mosquito searchers shoot up in May and increase steadily through July, then drop off throughout the coming fall and winter months.

In the U.S., mosquito season is viewed as more of an itchy nuisance than a health threat, but that has changed somewhat this year, at least perceptually.

Fears of Zika virus, which some believe may be associated with suspected cases of the birth defect microcephaly, started in Brazil and have quickly spread throughout the U.S. But are such fears warranted?

Experts Admit Zika Threat Risk 'Near Zero'

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that would provide $622 million to fight Zika virus. Yet, by White House estimates, this is « woefully inadequate. » They've recommended directing *$1.9 billion* to fight this latest declared public health emergency

But mosquito experts are questioning the extent of emergency that actually exists. Chris Barker, Ph.D. a mosquito-borne virus researcher at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, told WebMD:2

> « I think the risk for Zika actually setting up transmission cycles that become established in the continental U.S. is near zero."

Barker expects Zika to go the way of other tropical diseases spread by mosquitoes, such as dengue fever and chikungunya, in the U.S. with perhaps small clusters of outbreaks in southern states and little activity elsewhere.

Even in the Florida Keys (Florida, along with Louisiana and Texas, is said to be one of the states most at risk of mosquito-borne illnesses), the Monroe County Tourist Development Council reported:3

> "Dengue fever, chikungunya and Zika viruses are currently not a health threat in the Florida Keys including Key West …
>
> There has never been a report of a locally acquired case of chikungunya or Zika anywhere in the Florida Keys, according to officials at the Florida Department of Health in Monroe County."

No Locally Transmitted Cases of Zika Virus Reported in U.S.

As of May 25, 2016, Zika has not been spread by mosquitoes anywhere in the continental U.S.4 Calls to control the Aedes mosquitoes, which may carry Zika, have increased nonetheless, including in New York state, where experts say the risk of local transmission is low.

Laura Harrington, Ph.D., chair of Entomology at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York told WebMD:5

> « Here in New York state, there's been a lot of pressure placed on mosquito-control districts to do as much as they can. And, they're really strapped for resources, and there's not a huge risk of transmission … "

Maps released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show it's possible for Aedes mosquitoes to travel as far north as New York, Ohio, Kansas, Missouri and California. According to Harrington, the maps are inaccurate and causing unnecessary hysteria. Harrington continued:6

> « They're showing this mosquito in places where there's no way you're going to find them … It's really unfortunate, because it's causing a lot of hysteria in places where people should be focusing on other health issues, like Lyme disease. »

GE Mosquitoes to Fight Zika Virus?

Biotech company Oxitec has created genetically engineered (GE) mosquitoes that carry a "genetic kill switch." When they mate with wild female mosquitoes, their offspring inherit the lethal gene and cannot survive.7

To achieve this feat, Oxitec has inserted protein fragments from the herpes virus, E. coli bacteria, coral and cabbage into the insects. The GE mosquitoes have proven lethal to

native mosquito populations.

In the Cayman Islands, for instance, 96 percent of native mosquitoes were suppressed after more than 3 million GE mosquitoes were released in the area, with similar results reported in Brazil.8

Oxitec is seeking to release the GE mosquitoes in the U.S. to fight Zika, but as pointed out by Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston to USA Today, the GE mosquitoes have not been shown to reduce rates of diseases such as Zika.9

The GE mosquitoes may also prove to be too expensive for areas that *are* plagued with mosquito-borne diseases.

Environmental red flags have also been raised. The potential exists for these foreign genes, which hop from one place to another, to infect human blood by finding entry through skin lesions or inhaled dust.

Such transmission could potentially wreak havoc with the human genome by creating « insertion mutations » and other unpredictable types of DNA damage.10

And according to Todd Shelly, an entomologist for the Agriculture Department in Hawaii, 3.5 percent of the GE insects in a laboratory test survived to adulthood despite presumably carrying the lethal gene.11

It’s important to remember, too, that Oxitec wants emergency approval based on the supposed threat of a disease that has yet to have even one locally transmitted case.

Biotech Company Calls for ‘Emergency Approval’ of Controversial GE Mosquitoes

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has agreed with an environmental assessment submitted by Oxitec12 and stated that GE mosquitoes will not have a significant impact on the environment. Technically, this is referred to as a “finding of no significant impact” (FONSI).13

The FDA’s report is only preliminary, but Oxitec wants the FDA to throw caution to the wind and give the GE mosquitoes emergency approval in order to fight the Zika virus.

If approved, Oxitec, in partnership with the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District (FKMCD), plans to release the GE mosquitoes, which go by the name of OX513A, in Key Haven, Florida, an island of the Florida Keys located about 1 mile east of Key West.

More than 270,000 people have submitted comments criticizing the FDA’s environmental assessment, and numerous environmental groups are calling for the agency to conduct a more thorough review of the GE mosquitoes’ risks. Wenonah Hauter, executive director of Food & Water Watch, said:14

> “The FDA really missed the mark on this one … The agency seems so eager to speed the process along that they have failed to do a real review of the potential risks, and are ignoring widespread concern in the community where the release will happen.”

No Permits Required to Spray Near Water

A Clean Water Act permit is generally required to spray pesticides in areas where they might end up in water. The permit is intended to keep the toxic chemicals from contaminating water, but now the Zika virus has been used as an excuse to do away with this common-sense precaution.

The language was inserted into the Zika Vector Control Act, which was passed by the House of Representatives. It would exempt pesticide applicators from needing a Clean Water Act permit, even when spraying near water.

Critics argued the bill would do little to help fight Zika virus, since mosquito-control agencies already have authority to apply pesticides in emergency situations to prevent the spread of infectious disease without applying for permits.

Opponents say the bill has nothing to do with combatting Zika and, instead has been on the table for years, with the majority pushing for its passage "under whatever name" was convenient at the time.15

Aerial Mosquito Spraying Linked to Increased Risk of Autism

Greed is pushing for a number of potentially dangerous "solutions" to combat mosquitoes and related diseases. By removing requirements for permits when spraying pesticides near water, it's likely the use of these chemicals will skyrocket, including via aerial spraying.

Unfortunately, many may suffer as a result. In research presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies 2016 Meeting, aerial pesticide exposure was linked to an increased risk of developmental delays and autism spectrum disorder among children.16 The study compared children living in zip codes where aerial pesticide spraying was used each summer to combat mosquitoes that carry the eastern equine encephalitis virus, with children living in non-aerial-spraying zip codes.

Children exposed to the aerial pesticide spraying were about 25 percent more likely to be diagnosed with autism or have a documented developmental delay than those living in areas that used other methods of pesticide application (such as manual spreading of granules).

If authorities use the supposed threat of Zika to increase aerial spraying, it could increase children's risk of brain disorders, which is the opposite of what anti-Zika campaigns are supposed to achieve.

Are There Other Potential Explanations for an Increase in Microcephaly?

It's possible Zika-carrying mosquitoes could be involved in suspected cases of microcephaly, but there are other factors that should be considered as well. For starters, the outbreak occurred in a largely poverty-stricken agricultural area of Brazil that uses large amounts of banned pesticides.

Between these factors and the lack of sanitation and widespread vitamin A and zinc deficiency, you already have the basic framework for an increase in poor health outcomes among newborn infants in that area. Environmental pollution and toxic pesticide exposure have been positively linked to a wide array of adverse health effects, including birth defects.

For instance:

- Vitamin A deficiency has been linked to an increased risk of microcephaly
- The CDC lists malnutrition and exposure to toxic chemicals as known risk factors
- The CDC also notes certain infections during pregnancy, including rubella, cytomegalovirus, toxoplasmosis, and others are risk factors

Natural Ways to Repel Mosquitoes

Many experts agree that the threat of an epidemic outbreak of Zika virus on continental U.S. soil is virtually nonexistent. So you needn't go dousing your backyard in chemicals in an attempt to stay safe from the Zika virus (whose connection to birth defects is still being explored). If however, mosquitoes are bothersome for you, there are some steps you can take to encourage them to live elsewhere.

Draining standing water, including pet bowls, gutters, garbage and recycling bins, spare tires, bird baths, children's toys and so on, is important. This is where mosquitoes breed, so if you eliminate standing water you'll eliminate many mosquitoes. Planting marigolds around your yard also works as a bug repellent because the flowers give off a fragrance that bugs do not like. This is a great way to ward off mosquitoes without using chemical insecticides.

A simple house fan could also help keep mosquitoes at bay if you're having a get-together in your backyard or, for a longer-term solution, try installing a bat house (bats are voracious consumers of insects, especially mosquitoes).

It's best to *avoid* using bug zappers in your yard, as these may actually attract more mosquitoes while killing beneficial insects. Insect foggers designed to clear insects out of your backyard should also be avoided, as they require the use of strong, potentially harmful, pesticides and don't offer lasting protection.

Even those clip-on repellents and fans that are widely sold are best avoided, as they contain even more toxic ingredients than repellents that can be applied to your skin, and they pose an inhalation hazard.17

Some experts also recommend supplementing with one vitamin B1 tablet a day from April through October, and then adding 100 mg of B1 to a B-100 Complex daily during the mosquito season to make you less attractive to mosquitoes. Regularly consuming garlic may also help protect against mosquito bites, as may the following natural insect repellants:

- Cinnamon leaf oil (one study found it was more effective at killing mosquitoes than DEET18)
- Clear liquid vanilla extract mixed with olive oil
- Wash with citronella soap, and then put some 100 percent pure citronella essential oil on your skin. Java citronella is considered the highest quality citronella on the market
- Catnip oil (according to one study, this oil is 10 times more effective than DEET19)

Articles Par : Dr. Mercola