Climate change will make infectious disease outbreaks more common

As the catastrophic Ebola outbreak showed the world recently, the modern age of global air travel has made it far easier for disease to spread. But climate change, which is shuffling habitable zones for pathogen-carrying animals, is poised to make future outbreaks of infectious diseases such as Ebola, H1N1 and TB worse, and more frequent.

In an article published Sunday in the journal Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B, two zoologists studying parasites in drastically different environments–one in the Arctic, the other in tropical zones—relay what 30 years of research have taught them about the future of disease.

“Even though I was in the tropics and [zoologist Eric Hoberg] was in the Arctic, we could see something was happening,” Daniel Brooks, a zoologist with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said in a press release.

As climate change caused habitats to shift or disappear for certain species, parasites would simply jump to other species, an observation that challenges conventional thinking that parasites have co-evolved with their hosts and so do not quickly adapt to a new species. “Even though a parasite might have a very specialized relationship with one particular host in one particular place, there are other hosts that may be as susceptible,” Brooks said. The new parasite hosts will not have developed resistance to the species-jumping parasites, and so may be even more susceptible to the infection than the original host species, sparking epidemics more regularly.

Read full, original article: Climate Changed Poised to Make Infectious Disease Outbreaks More Frequent