

Why do disease outbreaks inspire conspiracy theories?

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The story of the Zika outbreak has been one of uncertainty, with constant new discoveries at every turn. The virus very likely causes neurological complications like Guillain-Barré and the birth defect microcephaly, for example, but scientists aren't 100 percent sure. It has only recently been linked to inflammation of the [brain](#) and [spinal cord](#).

But for all Zika's mysteries and surprises, we can safely say that it was not caused by genetically modified mosquitoes, that microcephaly cases aren't a result of larvicides used to kill mosquitoes in water, and that the outbreak is not an [attempt at population control by Bill Gates](#).

The outbreak, it seems, has created a breeding ground not just for the virus, but for conspiracy theories, which have hovered over the chaos of past epidemics as well. In 2014, for example, a Liberian newspaper accused the United States of using Ebola as a bioweapon. During the 2003 SARS outbreak, a couple of Russian medical experts [speculated](#) that the virus seemed to be man-made, which of course led conspiracy theorists down the bioweapon path again.

Is there something about these outbreaks of emerging diseases that makes them such fertile soil for conspiracies to grow in?

"There's a group of people out there who have what we might call a conspiracy mentality," says Joseph Uscinski, an associate professor of political science at the University of Miami, and author of [American Conspiracy Theories](#).

Read full, original post: [An Outbreak of Conspiracy Theories](#)