

Tracking Zika: New genetic tool maps how viruses spread around the world

We remain utterly unprepared to deal with epidemics at a global scale...The good news is that new inventions are continually improving our odds of succeeding against the next epidemic. One such invention [is] a [clever genetic tool](#) [called NextStrain] that maps in real time how viruses spread.

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Though the tool came a little too late for turning data into action for the Ebola and Zika epidemics, [Trevor Bedford, one of NextStrain's inventors and a researcher of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle,] described a scenario where NextStrain could have helped. Looking back, we know that Zika's hot zone was in north-eastern Brazil. With a real-time tracking tool to map how the virus spread, this hot zone could have been discovered sooner. This would have allowed health officials to concentrate efforts there and perhaps limit the disease's spread.

screen shot at am
source: [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/12/science/zika-virus.html](#)

How the Zika virus mutated over the years. Credit: NextStrain.

To be sure, NextStrain can't yet help in predicting outbreaks...Still, [it] is useful for tracking the spread of a disease once it has begun and blunting its assault.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [A new genetic tool maps how deadly viruses spread around the world in real time](#)

For more background on the Genetic Literacy Project, read [GLP](#) on Wikipedia.