Sudden increase in Zika’s potency linked to small mutation

It remains one of the great mysteries of the Zika epidemic: Why did a virus that existed for decades elsewhere in the world suddenly seem to become more destructive when it landed in Latin America? […] An intriguing study in mice, which has prompted some skepticism among experts, suggests that a single genetic mutation helped transform the Zika virus into a devastating force in Latin America.

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The study, by scientists in China, found that strains of Zika with the S139N mutation caused substantially more death and microcephaly in mice than other strains. And in a laboratory dish, the S139N strain killed many more human cells important to early brain development than an earlier strain without the mutation.

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“They showed this mutation is both sufficient and necessary to make the virus worse,” said Hongjun Song, a neuroscientist at the University of Pennsylvania. […] The researchers do not claim the S139N mutation is solely responsible for the birth defects among children born to women infected by mosquitoes during pregnancy. Other causes could involve differences in the population in Latin America, including the possibilities that their genetic makeup or exposure to previous mosquito-borne viruses made them more susceptible to harm from Zika.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: The Zika Virus Grew Deadlier With a Small Mutation, Study Suggests