

After years of public and regulatory resistance in the US, first batch of mosquitoes genetically engineered to end Zika, dengue and other transmittable diseases are released

After a decade of fighting for regulatory approval and public acceptance, a biotechnology firm has released genetically engineered mosquitoes into the open air in the United States for the first time. The experiment, launched this week in the Florida Keys — over the objections of some local critics — tests a method for suppressing populations of wild *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, which can carry diseases such as Zika, dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever.

Oxitec, the firm based in Abingdon, UK, that developed the mosquitoes, has previously field-tested the insects in [Brazil](#), Panama, the Cayman Islands and [Malaysia](#).

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But until now, owing to a circuitous series of regulatory decisions and [pushback from Florida residents](#) (see 'A long road'), no genetically engineered mosquito had been trialled in the United States — even though the country previously allowed tests of a genetically engineered [diamondback moth \(*Plutella xylostella*\) in New York](#) and an engineered pink bollworm (*Pectinophora gossypiella*) in Arizona, both developed by Oxitec. “When something new and revolutionary comes along, the immediate reaction of a lot of people is to say: ‘Wait.’,” says Anthony James, a molecular biologist focused on bioengineered mosquitoes at the University of California, Irvine. “So the fact that [Oxitec] was able to get the trial on the ground in the United States is a big deal.”

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