

## Will global warming roil natural habitats and unleash zoonotic plagues on humankind?

The word zoonosis comes from the Greek for “animal disease.” It applies to pathogens that can jump both between critters and from them to us. HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, hopped to humans from chimps, for example. MERS, a respiratory virus, spread to us [from dromedary camels](#).

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What does this have to do with climate change? A lot. The more animals mingle — with other fauna or us — the more opportunities the pathogens they’re hosting have to travel, mutate and spread. And global warming causes exactly such mingling.

As average temperatures rise, they change habitats. Wet areas become arid; cool or lush zones turn into deserts, and so forth.

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A team working with Colin Carlson, a biologist at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. has now used some very fancy math to model the contacts and cross-species virus transmission we can expect. They’ve published the [results in the journal Nature](#).

It makes for [frightening reading](#). Both the mingling and the transmission are already well underway but will accelerate dramatically in our lifetime. Even in the most conservative warming scenario, for example, we can expect another 15,000 viruses to hop among 3,000 species of mammals in the coming decades.

**[This is an excerpt. Read the original post here](#)**