

Calif. household mosquito could amplify Zika virus spread

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

A mosquito that's common in California has become the latest identified carrier of the Zika virus, potentially multiplying the population of vectors capable of spreading the disease.

Until last week, researchers believed the virus could only be spread by two types of aedes mosquito much rarer in California and the U.S. But new research by a UC Davis ecologist and a top Brazilian science institution pins the southern variety of the culex mosquito – known as the southern house mosquito – as a potential vector of the disease, which can only be transmitted when a mosquito bites an infected person and then bites someone else.

Walter Leal, a chemical ecologist at UC Davis and a collaborator on the research, helped make the finding while testing mosquitoes in the northeastern Brazilian city of Recife. Zika, an often symptomless illness, has been blamed for a neurological defect called microcephaly in hundreds of babies around the world and has reached epidemic levels in Brazil.

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