

Hurricanes help stop West Nile virus

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Hurricanes caused widespread damage last year across southern Louisiana, but they reportedly produced one benefit: they helped stop West Nile virus.

Louisiana State Epidemiologist Raoult Ratard said the immense amounts of rain that fell onto southern Louisiana during last year's hurricane season did not, as some feared, lead to a surge in mosquito-borne West Nile virus infections.

Although mosquitoes breed in water, the storms flushed out stagnant areas they like for breeding. The heavy rainfall killed adult mosquitoes, washed away larvae and killed or dispersed the birds that carry West Nile after mosquitoes bite them, Ratard told the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

There were only scattered reports of infections last year in the New Orleans area, where Hurricane Katrina struck, and southwest Louisiana, where Hurricane Rita roared ashore, Ratard said.

The most West Nile virus cases last year occurred in Caddo Parish, in Louisiana's northwest corner, which logged 24 cases, and East Baton Rouge Parish, where 23 infections were reported. But across the entire seven-parish New Orleans area, there were 26 infections.

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