

Study: Malaria outbreaks can be forecast

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A British study suggests malaria epidemics can be predicted up to five months in advance by using a climate forecasting computer model.

Climate drives both the development of the malaria parasite and the behavior of the mosquitoes that carry it, said Tim Palmer, chief of the predictability and seasonal forecast division at the European Center for Medium Range Weather Forecasts in Reading, England.

Palmer and colleagues developed a system that uses climate data to forecast potential anomalously high or low incidences of malaria. They successfully used the model to retrospectively predict malaria epidemics in Botswana from 1982 to 2002.

A previous study established that monitoring rainfall and sea surface temperature could predict the peak of a malaria season up to one month in advance. But with an extra four months of lead time, Palmer and his associates suggest insecticides could be more strategically targeted and drug stocks better managed.

The research appears in the journal *Nature*.

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