

# Another outbreak of coral disease hits reefs of Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii

January 6 2012

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Red rice coral in Kaneohe Bay affected by acute MWS resulting in dead white skeleton being exposed.

The disease called acute Montipora White Syndrome (MWS) has reappeared and is again killing corals in Kaneohe Bay, O‘ahu.

The current outbreak has already affected 198 colonies of rice coral (*Montipora capitata*). In March 2010 an outbreak of MWS was discovered affecting coral reefs in Kaneohe Bay. Follow-up surveys found that the disease left trails of rubble in its wake. It was estimated that over 100 colonies of rice coral died during that initial outbreak. A rapid response team led by Dr. Greta Aeby, Assistant Researcher at the Hawai‘i Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, has been activated to document the [outbreak](#).

Members of the investigative team include scientists from UH Mānoa, HIMB, and the United States Geologic Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center.

Corals are the very foundation of the coral reef ecosystem and are under threat from overfishing, land-based pollution and emerging [coral](#) diseases. Successive disease outbreaks with little intervening time for growth and repair of the corals are particularly damaging to reefs. Dr. Aeby's team has been studying MWS for the past several years and has determined that it is an infectious disease that only affects rice corals (*Montipora* sp.). Laboratory experiments suggest that MWS is caused by pathogenic bacteria. Work is underway to understand environmental variables, such as increased seawater temperatures associated with climate change or land-based sources of pollution, that may contribute to these recurring disease outbreaks. Reef resources play an important role in the culture and economy of Hawai'i and discovering the cause(s) will help resource managers and scientists develop methods designed to prevent or mitigate the impact of outbreaks on Hawai'i's reefs.

Members of the Eyes of the Reef Network (EOR), a program that trains community members to identify threats to Hawai'i's reefs, are being asked to report on any signs of [disease](#) from other reefs.

Provided by University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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