



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Study: Your Smell Could Attract Mosquitoes

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A new study finds that some people **attract** mosquitoes much more than others, and it probably involves the way they smell.

The researchers found that people who attract mosquitoes the most produce a lot of certain chemicals on their skin. These chemicals are connected to the **scent** that attracts the mosquitoes.

Leslie Vosshall is one of the authors of the study and a neurobiologist at Rockefeller University in New York. She said, “If you have high levels of this stuff on your skin, you’re going to be the one at the **picnic** getting all the bites.”

For many years, there have been a lot of ideas about who is likely to get bitten more. But those ideas have not been supported by strong evidence, Vosshall said.

For the study, researchers designed an experiment to have people’s scents compete against each other.

They asked 64 volunteers to wear **stockings** around their forearms to absorb, or take in, the scent from their skin. The stockings were put in separate traps at the end of a long tube. Then, **dozens** of mosquitoes were released.

The mosquitoes came to some traps much more than others. The scientists did the experiment several times, always changing which stockings were competing against each other. At the end, they discovered a huge difference between stockings. The most attractive stocking was around 100 times more attractive to the mosquitoes than the last-place finisher.

The experiment used a kind of mosquito that spreads diseases like yellow fever, Zika and dengue. Vosshall said she would expect similar results from other kinds of mosquitoes. But additional research needs to be done to know for sure.

By testing the same people for over a year, the study showed that these big differences remain, said Matt DeGennaro, a neurogeneticist at Florida International University. He was not involved in the research.

“Mosquito magnets seem to remain mosquito magnets,” DeGennaro said.

The researchers found a common **factor**: Mosquito magnets had high levels of certain acids on their skin. People produce them in different amounts, Vosshall said. The healthy bacteria that live on the skin eat up these acids and produce part of the way our skin smells, she said.

The research could help find new ways to **repel** mosquitoes, said Jeff Riffell, a neurobiologist at the University of Washington who was not involved with the study. There may be ways to affect the skin bacteria and change the smell that attracts mosquitoes, he said.

However, he said that would be hard to do. Researchers also did the experiment with mosquitoes whose genes were changed to damage their sense of smell. But they still flew to the same mosquito magnets.

Vosshall said mosquitoes have ways to find us even if we change some conditions. “They have many **backup** plans to be able to find us and bite us,” she said.

I’m Andrew Smith.

Maddie Burakoff wrote this story for the Associated Press. Andrew Smith adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

attract -*v.* to bring attention to something or make something come towards another thing

scent -*n.* an odor or smell

picnic -*n.* a meal eaten outdoors, often in a park or other natural setting

stockings -*n.* tight-fitting covering for legs, feet, or arms, usually made of nylon

dozen -*n.* a group of twelve items

factor -*n.* a thing or element that has an effect on a situation or event

repel -*v.* to force or move away something coming towards an object

backup -*n.* alternatives, other options

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