



# Rajasthan Zika strain is endemic to Asia, says new study

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## **National Institute of Virology paper contradicts Health Ministry release that suggested Brazilian-like strain had entered India**

- The Zika virus that infected 159 people in an outbreak in Rajasthan last year, could have been circulating in India for several years and is endemic to Asia, according to a new study published in the journal Infection, Genetics and Evolution this week.
- The study, led by authors from Pune's National Institute of Virology (NIV), an institute under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), is the first to sequence full Zika virus genomes from India.

### **Confers herd immunity**

- It suggests that people in the region may have been previously exposed to the virus, building herd immunity that may limit future outbreaks.
- During the latter half of 2018, India recorded its first major Zika outbreaks in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
- While this is good news, because it implies that a portion of the population could be immune, it could also mean that Zika-related birth defects such as microcephaly were occurring even before the virus was first detected in India.
- The NIV paper is also more cautious than the Ministry's press release on the implications of a mutation in the viral genome called S139N.

The Hindu