

Zika link to paralysing disease

By James Rothwell

SCIENTISTS claim to have established a link between the Zika virus and a paralysing nerve disorder called Guillain-Barre, raising fears of a surge in cases of the potentially fatal condition.

Guillain-Barre makes the body's immune system attack the nervous system, which can lead to paralysis and death. It usually occurs after exposure to a bug, virus or parasite, with symptoms worsening rapidly within weeks.

Prof Arnaud Fontanet and his team at France's Institut Pasteur, working with researchers in Tahiti, analysed

blood samples from 42 people with Guillain-Barre syndrome during a Zika outbreak in French Polynesia in 2013-14. Around 88 per cent of patients had reported Zika virus symptoms six days before symptoms of the nerve disorder, such as weakness in the arms and legs.

The data suggests that of every 100,000 people who contract Zika virus, around 24 would be expected to develop the syndrome.

The Zika outbreak, which started in the Americas last year, has led to epidemics in about 40 countries, of which eight reported cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome possibly connected to Zika.

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