

Climate change may help spread diseases

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NEW YORK -- Climate change may promote the spread of deadly diseases like malaria and asthma in both rich and poor countries by increasing the range of parasitic insects and whipping up dust from storms, a new report said.

As climates warm, malaria is becoming more common in the traditionally cool mountains of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where 10 percent of the world's people live, said Dr. Paul Epstein, the lead author of "Climate Change Futures."

"Colonizers escaped [to mountainous areas] to avoid the swamps that bred malaria. Those areas are no longer safe," Epstein told reporters upon presenting the study yesterday, noting that malaria cases have quadrupled in the past 10 years and kill 3,000 African babies a day.

Epstein, of Harvard Medical School, wrote the report in collaboration with reinsurer Swiss Re and the United Nations Development Program. The report warned that "malaria could suddenly swell in developed nations, especially in those areas now bordering the margins of current transmission."

Some scientists believe greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide released by cars and utilities burning fossil fuels, lead to climate change by trapping the sun's heat in the atmosphere. That can lead to rising seas, which may cause flooding and stronger storms.

Rising temperatures increase the range of the mosquitoes and ticks that carry maladies like malaria, West Nile virus, and Lyme disease, the study said.

Cases of asthma, which is worsened by particulates in the air, can increase from greater amounts of carbon dioxide, the report said.

In addition, stronger winds from climate change increase the amount of dust in the air from expanding deserts, compounding the effects of air pollutants and smog as well as the risks to people with asthma, it said. ■