**Zika may be linked to the disability that Donald Trump mocked**

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One of the lowest points of Donald Trump’s campaign for the presidency has involved accusations that he mocked a reporter with a disability. “Now, the poor guy — you’ve got to see this guy,” Trump said while jerking his arms in front of his body at a rally in South Carolina in November.

While the ensuing firestorm about whether Trump meant to make fun of anyone’s physical appearance and what that says about him as a leader was more about politics than anything related to health, it drew worldwide attention to a rare congenital joint condition known as arthrogryposis. Arthrogryposis typically affects development of the arms and legs and results in the joints being fixed in a bent or straightened position.

Shortly before Trump made the remarks about the “poor guy,” he had been talking about an article written by New York Times investigative reporter Serge Kovaleski, who has the condition.

The cause of the condition has long been a mystery. Most people with the condition don’t have any genetic markers for it, but some do. Previous research has suggested it might be neurological, having to do with dysfunction of the spinal cord or brain, or maybe something involving a lack of fetal movement due to insufficient room in the uterus. The condition probably has many different causes.

A new study published in the BMJ on Tuesday suggests another intriguing possibility — that arthrogryposis may be yet another condition linked to Zika. (The BMJ was formerly known as the British Medical Journal.)

The mosquito-borne virus, which is raging in South America and has now reached Florida, causes microcephaly, in which the head is abnormally small, and other brain damage in fetuses. Possibly thousands of babies have been born with microcephaly due to Zika. It has also been linked to at least two neurological issues in adults: Guillain-Barré syndrome, in which the immune system attacks the nerves, and acute disseminated encephalomyelitis, or ADEM, which is similar to multiple sclerosis.

The BMJ study was based in Recife, the city in Brazil that is at the epicenter of the Zika epidemic, and the study was tiny. It’s important to note that no definitive conclusions can be drawn because of the small sample size and because of the study’s design, which was observational.

The work involved studying high-definition brain and joint images of seven children who had arthrogryposis and who appeared to have been infected with Zika.

Researcher Vanessa van der Linden from the Barão de Lucena Hospital and colleagues found two interesting things. First, none of the children had traditional signs of joint abnormalities. This led them to theorize that the arthrogryposis wasn’t due to abnormalities in the joints but in the nerves that control them.

But all of them did show signs of something else abnormal: calcium buildup in their brains, a condition that had previously been linked to Zika. The virus may be destroying brain cells during fetal development, and scars where calcium isdeposited formed in those areas. The researchers wondered whether the condition might influence the way motor neurons carry signals.

They concluded that while more studies are needed, there appears to be enough information that “congenital Zika syndrome should be added to the differential diagnosis of congenital infections and arthrogryposis.”