**Forget mosquito repellent! Sleeping next to a CHICKEN will keep the blood-sucking insects at bay**

* **In test, fewer mosquitoes were counted in a room containing a live chicken**
* **Means sleeping next to a chicken may help protect people against malaria**
* **Disease carried by the insects puts 3.2 billion people at risk**

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If you're tired of slathering yourself with smelly chemical mosquito repellent and want a more natural way to avoid being bitten, sleeping next to a live chicken might help.

Scientists have found that the smell of fowl sends the blood-sucking bugs packing.

And while the method may sound bizarre, it could save the lives some of the 3.2 billion people at risk of malaria, for example.

To test the theory, volunteers slept in beds surrounded by mosquito nets.

They found the much-loathed insects steered clear of their room when a cage containing a live chicken, or its feathers, was suspended outside the bed.

The discovery, published in the Malaria Journal, offers hope of developing new methods of repelling mosquitos – and preventing diseases spread by them, particularly malaria.

Researchers found that Anopheles arabiensis - one of the main species that transmits malaria in sub-Saharan Africa - avoids chickens when looking for hosts to feed on.

Experts at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia found that while the mosquitos greatly prefer biting humans, they will also target cattle, goats and sheep if they are available.

But chickens are not a species that An. Arabiensis likes to attack – and the pests actively avoid flying near them.

The mosquitoes use their sense of smell to distinguish between a tasty treat and a chicken they don't like.

Rickard Ignell, the corresponding author, said: ‘We were surprised to find that malaria mosquitoes are repelled by the odours emitted by chickens.

'This study shows for the first time that malaria mosquitoes actively avoid feeding on certain animal species, and that this behaviour is regulated through odour cues.’

In each of the houses, a single volunteer aged between 27 and 36 years slept under an untreated bed net – and traps were positioned in the room to count the number of mosquitos that flew in.

The authors said significantly fewer mosquitos were caught in traps in the room that were baited with chicken odours – taken from chicken feathers.

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They said that ‘suspending a living chicken in a cage next to a trap had a similar repellent effect.’

Rickard Ignell said: ‘People in sub-Saharan Africa have suffered considerably under the burden of malaria over an extended period of time and mosquitoes are becoming increasingly physiologically resistant to pesticides, while also changing their feeding habits for example by moving from indoors to outdoors.

‘For this reason there is a need to develop novel control methods.

'In our study, we have been able to identify a number of natural odour compounds which could repel host-seeking malaria mosquitoes and prevent them from getting in contact with people.’