How to stop mosquitoes from entering your home? New study suggests living with a chicken

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The smell of chickens could be a key to preventing the transmission of malaria, or even Zika, a study suggests.

Scientists from Sweden and Ethiopia found that malaria-carrying mosquitoes avoided homes where a live chicken had been suspended in a cage.

They believe the insects shunned the bug-eating birds because chicken blood is not sufficiently nutritious to justify risking being killed. Crucially, the scientists said, the mosquitoes did not have to see the fowl to be deterred as the smell alone created a repellent “odour bubble”.

Most would not enter a house, let alone a bedroom, that contained a chicken, the study, published in Malaria Journal, found.

Scientists said they had isolated the chemical compounds and were planning to develop a synthetic repellent.

Prof Rickard Ignell, of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, said: “We were surprised to find that malaria mosquitoes are repelled by the odours emitted by chickens. The difference between this repellent and ones on the market is it acts on a very large scale.

“Most repellents only work after a mosquito lands on you, but we know that this can cut (mosquito) populations by up to 95 per cent throughout an entire house.”

Asked if the repellent could also work to stop Zika, Prof Ignell said: “I think it should. We haven’t tested it on other mosquitoes but there are lots of varieties that won’t feed on chickens.”