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# A deadly mosquito virus is spreading in the US. Could it come to NC? Here's what to know

BY EVAN MOORE
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A person in New York died Monday, Sept. 30, after a contracting a rare virus not seen in the state in more than a decade.

The person died after being diagnosed with **eastern equine encephalitis** (EEE), a virus spread to people by the bite of an infected mosquito, ABC News reported.

Only about 11 human cases of the virus are reported each year in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Though the virus is rare, **roughly a third of all people who develop a severe version of the virus die**, and those who survive are left with long-term physical and mental problems, ranging from **personality disorders** to **paralysis**, the CDC says.

Could the virus make its way to North Carolina? Here's everything you need to know.

## COULD EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS COME TO NC?

There's **no evidence to show that EEE will be worse in North Carolina this year**, but rain from recent tropical storms and Hurricane Helene could lead to more mosquito activity in the state, N.C. Department of Health and Human Services Entomologist Mike Doyle told The Charlotte Observer.

"The extra rain from Debbie...has increased water significantly on the eastern part of the state, so there's more mosquito larval sites, or mosquitoes growing in the water presently, but we don't have the evidence of infection within the mosquitoes or humans so far," Doyle said.

There haven't been any human cases of EEE reported in North Carolina this year, but **there have been cases in the past**, CDC data show. The most recent case occurred in 2021.

North Carolina averages about one case of EEE per year, and **the disease is more common in the eastern part of the state** than in other geographic regions, according to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services.

Historical CDC data show that at least one human case of EEE has been reported in the following counties since 2003:

- Catawba
- Mecklenburg
- Pitt
- Perquimans
- Pender
- Brunswick
- Cumberland
- Hoke
- Robeson

There have been 10 human cases of EEE reported in the U.S. this year, according to CDC data.

ANDRE PENNER AP

Eastern equine encephalitis is spread the the bite of an infected mosquito.

Non-human cases and infections, or cases found in mosquitoes, birds and other animals, have been reported in the majority of coastal and piedmont counties in North Carolina since 2003, CDC data show.

## WHO IS MOST AT-RISK OF CONTRACTING EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS?

The CDC says the following groups are at increased risk of infection:

- Residents of and visitors to areas with eastern equine encephalitis virus activity (the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states)
- People who work and participate in recreational activities outdoors in endemic areas
- People over 50 years of age or under 15 years of age

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS?

Most people with EEE have no symptoms, but the CDC says symptoms of severe cases include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Seizures
- Behavioral changes
- Drowsiness

The symptoms of EEE are similar to other neuroinvasive mosquito viruses, such as **West Nile virus** and **La Crosse encephalitis**, which are more common than EEE, Doyle said.

"They all start very similar," said Doyle. "It's not something that the average person or even physician, in many cases, could tell the difference early in the disease. And so we encourage people to seek medical attention from a health provider, and the provider can order a test through the state laboratory that covers all of the known viruses here."

## HOW TO PREVENT EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS

There are no vaccines or treatment for EEE, but you can reduce your chances of contracting the virus by **preventing mosquito bites**, according to the CDC.

Here are some ways you can prevent mosquito bites, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:

- **Remove mosquito habitats** by eliminating standing water in rain gutters, old tires, buckets, plastic covers, toys, or any other container where mosquitoes can breed.
- **Use structural barriers** by covering gaps in walls, doors, and windows to prevent mosquitoes from entering and making sure window and door screens are in good working order.
- **Avoid getting bitten** by keeping mosquitoes away from exposed skin by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks. You can also tuck your shirt into your pants and pants into socks to cover gaps in your clothing where mosquitoes can get to your skin. Using insect repellent can also be helpful.

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# No power but only minor damage: Spruce Pine quartz mine owner updates Helene recovery

BY BRIAN GORDON
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The world's main producer of high-purity quartz, a mineral crucial to the global supply of semiconductor chips, announced its shuttered Spruce Pine, North Carolina, mines have endured "minor damage," according to an initial assessment conducted after Tropical Storm Helene upended the town.

"Our dedicated teams are on-site, conducting cleanup and repair activities to restart operations as soon as we can," the mine owner, Sibelco, wrote in an update Friday. The private Belgian company added the power remains out at its Western North Carolina mines but that repairs have "progressed significantly."

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Andrew Zook, left, helps to clear instruments and other items from the mud inside Majestic Music in downtown Spruce Pine on Thursday, days after Hurricane Helene brought heavy flooding to the area.

With around 500 employees, Sibelco is the largest employer in Mitchell County, a rural mountainous area northeast of Asheville. The company said all its employees and contractors had been accounted for following last week's storm, which dumped more than two feet of rain on Spruce Pine and flooded the local North Toe River. Its facilities have been closed since Sept. 26.

Sibelco's mines sit north of downtown in an area called the Spruce Pine Mining District. Like much of the region, Mitchell County has sustained extensive road and rail line damage, which could hinder employees' ability to get to the mines and Sibelco's ability to move its valuable quartz.

Free of impurities, Spruce Pine quartz has been crucial to the supply of semiconductor wafers, solar panels and other fast-growing technologies.

"It is rare, unheard-of almost, for a single site to control the global supply of a crucial material," wrote Ed Conway in his 2023 book "Material World." "Yet if you want to get high-purity quartz — the kind you need to make those crucibles without which you can't make silicon wafers — it has to come from Spruce Pine."

Sibelco has grown to keep up with the demand. Between 2019 and 2023, the company increased its production of high-quality quartz by almost 60%. And in April 2023, Sibelco committed to invest $200 million in its Spruce Pine facilities to double production by next year.

On Friday, the company said its final product stock "has not been impacted" by the storm. "We are working closely with our customers to assess their needs and plan the restart of product shipments as soon as we can," Sibelco said.

Sibelco sells its white quartz sand under the brand name IOTA, which the company states online is "indispensable in the manufacture of a wide range of high-tech products."

Disruptions at the Spruce Pine mines have previously impacted the supply chain of quartz; In 2008, a fire at a local quartz refinery "temporarily brought production to a halt and impacted the market," the consulting firm Global Risk Intel reported.

Sibelco isn't the only quartz mining company in Spruce Pine. In recent years, a second company named The Quartz Corp opened area mines. On Tuesday, The Quartz Corp confirmed it had also stopped operations following Helene, noting "we have no visibility on when they will restart."

Compared to Sibelco's sites, The Quartz Corp mine is positioned closer to the North Toe River.

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# Supreme Court to hear cases on guns, porn, environment

BY MICHAEL MACAGNONE
*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON

The Supreme Court starts a new term Monday that includes cases on guns, e-cigarettes and environmental standards that will give the conservative majority a chance to further tame the power of administrative agencies.

The justices in recent terms have expanded the court's power to review federal government actions and policies, and several administrative law experts expect more of the same in the coming months.

"The Supreme Court has been, I think it's not too strong to say, waging war on the administrative state," Lisa Heinzerling, a law professor at the Georgetown Law Center, said at a Center for American Progress event.

Jonathan Adler, a law professor at Case Western University, said that last term a trio of major cases on agency powers "created a very significant administrative law term overall. I think we should expect something similar this year."

The justices also teed up cases for this term on hot-button social issues, such as whether Republican states went too far with laws that ban gender-affirming care for minors or require age verification for access to porn websites.

Deepak Gupta, a founding partner at Gupta Wessler who spoke at a Georgetown Law Center event, called the gender-affirming ban "the blockbuster case" in a term that "seems otherwise to have been designed to be sleepy."

The justices so far have agreed to decide 28 cases, less than half of the number it decided last year. The court is expected to announce as soon as Monday some other cases it will decide by the conclusion of the term in June.

Fewer of them at this point seem to hold the potential to be the kind of major decisions that the court handed down at the end of last term on abortion or criminal charges against former President Donald Trump.

At the same time, experts say a close election in November could thrust the court back into controversy if it is called on to intervene in any election-related challenges, as it was in 2020.

Gupta said that it's notable there are several potentially impactful cases the court could decide to hear later in the term, but it has a relatively clear docket for now heading into the election.

"I mean, that's just a theory, but it did seem like they're being deliberately boring," at the start of the term, Gupta said.

The first oral arguments of the term are the first two weeks in October, and they include disputes over procedural filings in state and federal courts, a challenge to a death penalty conviction and a fight over the future of the Biden administration's effort to regulate so-called "ghost guns" assembled from kits.

In one case, the Biden administration seeks to implement a 2022 Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives rule requiring that gun kits have serial numbers and only be sold with background checks.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit decision halted the regulation, ruling that the agency went too far with a provision in the Gun Control Act of 1968 that allows it to consider a finished "frame or receiver" to be a firearm.

In the Garland v. VanDerStok case at the court, the Biden administration argues that the gun kits can be turned into a working firearm with a few minutes of work and basic power tools, and so should be treated as firearms under federal law.

In another case, the justices are considering the scope of what federal agencies can require for environmental reviews – a major step in many construction and other infrastructure projects.

Heinzerling said the case – Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County, Colorado – will allow the court "to speak broadly on exactly what kind of impacts are being considered when this comes to climate change, it's really important."

In two cases this term, the Supreme Court will decide to what lengths the government may infringe on constitutional rights under the premise of protecting children.

In U.S. v. Skrmetti, the justices accepted the Biden administration's challenge to a Tennessee state law that restricts access to gender-affirming care for minors in the state.

# US hiring surges, surpassing expectations

BY TALMON JOSEPH SMITH
*NYT News Service/Syndicate Stories*

Despite all the hand-wringing, the U.S. labor market remains impressively strong.

Businesses reported adding 254,000 jobs in September, the government reported Friday. The number far surpassed forecasts and was the strongest monthly gain since March.

The unemployment rate declined to 4.1%, from 4.2%.

The strong growth follows months of slower hiring and bolstered odds that the U.S. economy can avoid losing momentum. The report eased analysts' concerns that based on historical trends, a recession could be looming.

Real-time estimates of overall economic growth remain strong. Productivity is robust. Household and corporate balance sheets are healthy overall. Retail sales are still solid. And interest rates, though still high, have recently fallen.

Here's what else to know about the report:

- **Job gains were widespread:** Employment in food services and drinking places surged in September, growing by 69,000. Health care added 45,000 jobs, and government jobs increased by 31,000. Construction employment, with a gain of 25,000, also continued its upward swing.
- **Recent months look stronger:** Summer was not so bad after all. The employment numbers for July and August were revised upward by a total of 72,000 jobs.
- **Pay gains remain robust:** Average hourly earnings for workers were better than expected, growing at 0.4% on a monthly basis and 4% over the past 12 months. With overall inflation slowing, that is welcome news for households that have been frustrated in recent years by price increases.
- **A snapshot without disruptions:** The report is based on a survey by the Bureau of Labor Statistics taken before several major disruptions – including Hurricane Helene and the continuing strike at Boeing – that are likely to make the underlying trends in the labor market harder to tease out in the near term.