


## ARTICLE



# Bangladesh flood not linked with diarrhea

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By Lindsey Konkel

NEW YORK | Fri Dec 9, 2011 3:16pm EST

(Reuters Health) - Contrary to previous reports, a new study of people in rural Bangladesh found little increased risk of diarrhea during or after a 2004 flood.





Floods can disrupt sewage systems and contaminate freshwater supplies, increasing exposure to disease-carrying microorganisms. Previous research, including a thirty-year data set from the same region of Bangladesh, has linked seasonal monsoons to waterborne illnesses such as cholera.

The findings show that it's important for researchers to take other factors into account, lead author Dr. Masahiro Hashizume, of Nagasaki University in [Japan](#), told Reuters Health by email.

The team of researchers from [Japan](#), England and Bangladesh examined data from more than 200,000 residents of Matlab, a rural

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delta region. The 2004 floods affected 36 million people across the country.

Dr. Hashizume and colleagues analyzed cases of diarrhea and respiratory infections recorded by the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh, between 2001 and 2007.

Their findings are published in the journal *Epidemiology*.

Approximately 66,000 people included in the study lived in an area vulnerable to seasonal flooding, while about 144,000 people lived in an area that did not flood.

During the study period, researchers identified roughly 4,200 cases of diarrhea from non-flooded areas and more than 2,800 cases from flooded areas that flooded in 2004.

Unlike some earlier studies, the authors accounted for pre-existing differences in the rate of disease between the flooded and non-flooded areas, as well as typical rates of diarrhea and respiratory infection in each area during the wet season (June to September).

Though there is usually a higher risk of diarrhea in flooded areas during the monsoon season, Dr. Hashizume and colleagues found no evidence for excess risk of diarrhea or death due to the 2004 flood itself.

Researchers analyzed more than 23,100 respiratory infections in non-flooded areas and more than 11,300 cases of respiratory infection in the flooded area.

For six months after the flood, children younger than five living in flooded areas also had a 25 percent higher risk of respiratory infections than those living in nearby non-flooded areas, after accounting for seasonal norms.

Respiratory infections, including pneumonia and influenza are a major cause of illness in people displaced by [natural disasters](#) and are a leading cause of death worldwide in children younger than five, according to the World Health Organization.

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interventions to reduce communicable and waterborne illness, including tube wells, education about good household hygiene, and early medical intervention for diarrhea.

These interventions make Bangladesh more the exception than the norm among developing countries, Dr. Gerald Keusch, an infectious disease specialist at Boston University, told Reuters Health.

Also, given that many other studies have shown a link between diarrhea and flooding, it's difficult to generalize the results of the study, Shafiqul Islam, an environmental engineer and professor of water diplomacy at Tufts University in Boston, told Reuters Health. He was not involved in the study.

Worldwide, floods are the most common natural disaster. The frequency and intensity of flood events is expected to increase with climate change.

"Not only do we need to find ways to mitigate flooding, we must also find ways to lessen the global health impact of flooding," said Dr. Keusch, who was not involved in the study.

SOURCE: [bit.ly/sDt3rk](http://bit.ly/sDt3rk) Epidemiology, online November 11, 2011.

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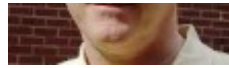
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