

### Disease Hotline

Scientists have come up with a system to forecast the outbreak of diseases such as dengue fever and Ebola from telephone calls.

Researchers from New York University have based their disease-predicting technique on telephone calls to a public-health hotline. They claim it can forecast an outbreak two to three weeks ahead of time with a high degree of precision. The system measures the number of calls received at a health hotline facility to forecast the number of cases.

“We think our technique can be of use to public-health officials in their fight against the spread of crippling diseases” says Professor Subramanian. “Once a hotspot has been identified, healthcare workers can move to stop its spread.”

Collecting disease surveillance data is expensive and time-consuming, say the researchers. “Early warning systems in the past only generate alerts of disease outbreaks on a city or state level,” said Nabeel Abdur Rehman, who also worked on the research. “We have developed a system that can pinpoint the location inside a city where disease activity has increased so the government could perform targeted control of a disease,” he added.



*iWeekend, 2016*