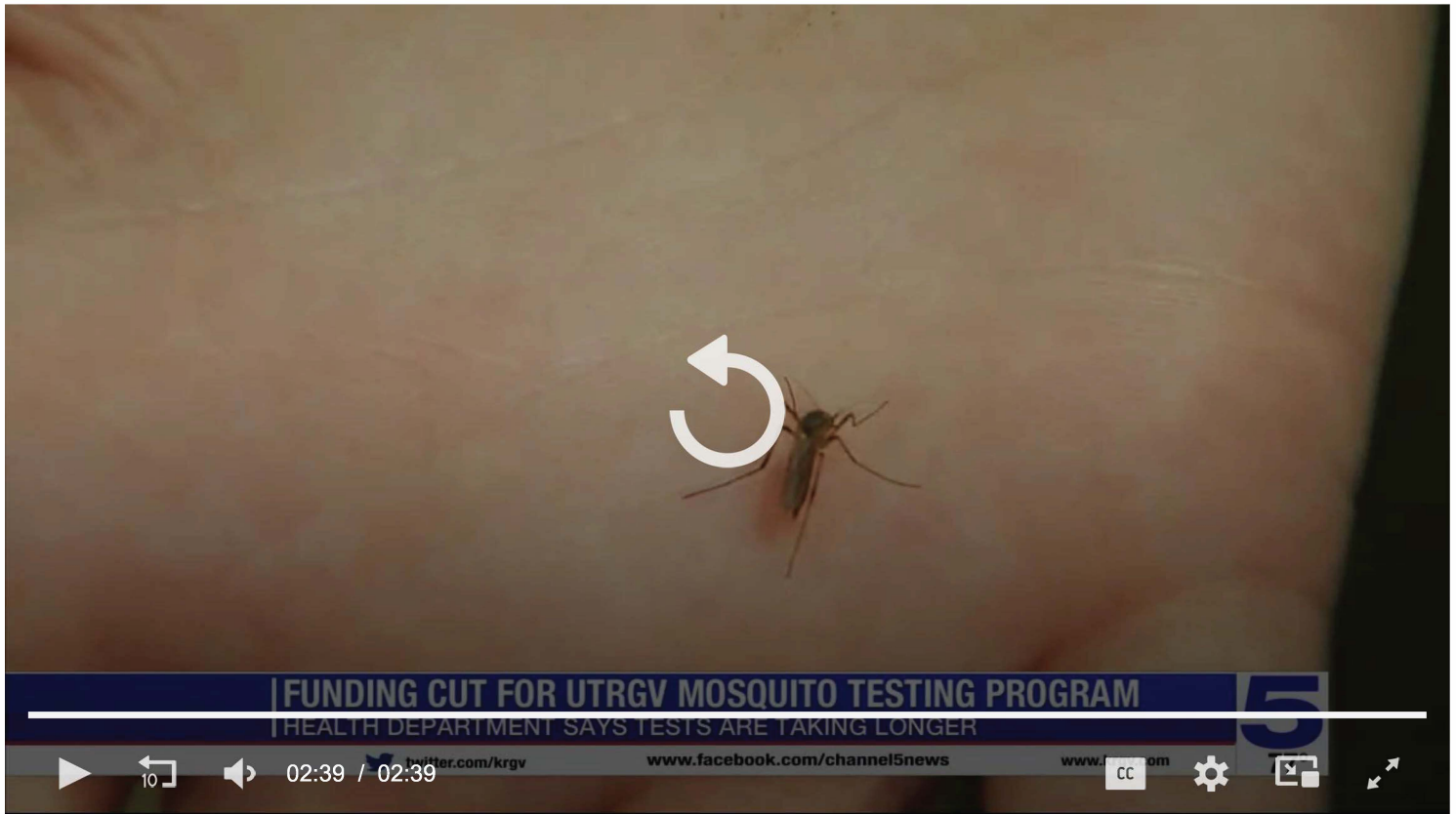


Funding cut for UTRGV mosquito testing program

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It may take longer to find out whether Valley mosquitoes are carrying diseases like West Nile and Zika.

Federal grant funding to a UTRGV mosquito testing program was not renewed this past summer, meaning tests to determine if they carry disease will be sent to Austin and beyond for analysis.

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Dr. Christopher Vitek, the center director at the Vector-borne disease lab at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, said the grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that started in 2017 brought in \$150 thousand a year.

"We'd be testing 100, 200, 300 mosquitoes, but we were maybe getting up to 1,000 a week," Dr. Vitek said. "So that's where a lot of those funds went."

Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Chief Administrative Officer Eddie Olivarez says the change is making it take longer to get results back.

However, Vitek said testing done at the state level is efficient.

"I don't want to panic anybody or anything like that," Dr. Vitek said. "The testing is still being done by the state. It does the testing on a regular basis. Our goal was not to be the sole testing source. It was mostly assistance, supplement the state efforts in a region we were concerned was potential high risk for things like Zika virus."

So far, there are no reports of any mosquito-borne illnesses in the Valley.

The closest known case in 2022 was a mosquito found bearing West Nile Virus in Kingsville, 90 miles away from the Valley on September 13.

"So long as we're still having days that are 70, 80, 90 degrees, then there's still going to be mosquito activity," said Vitek.

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