

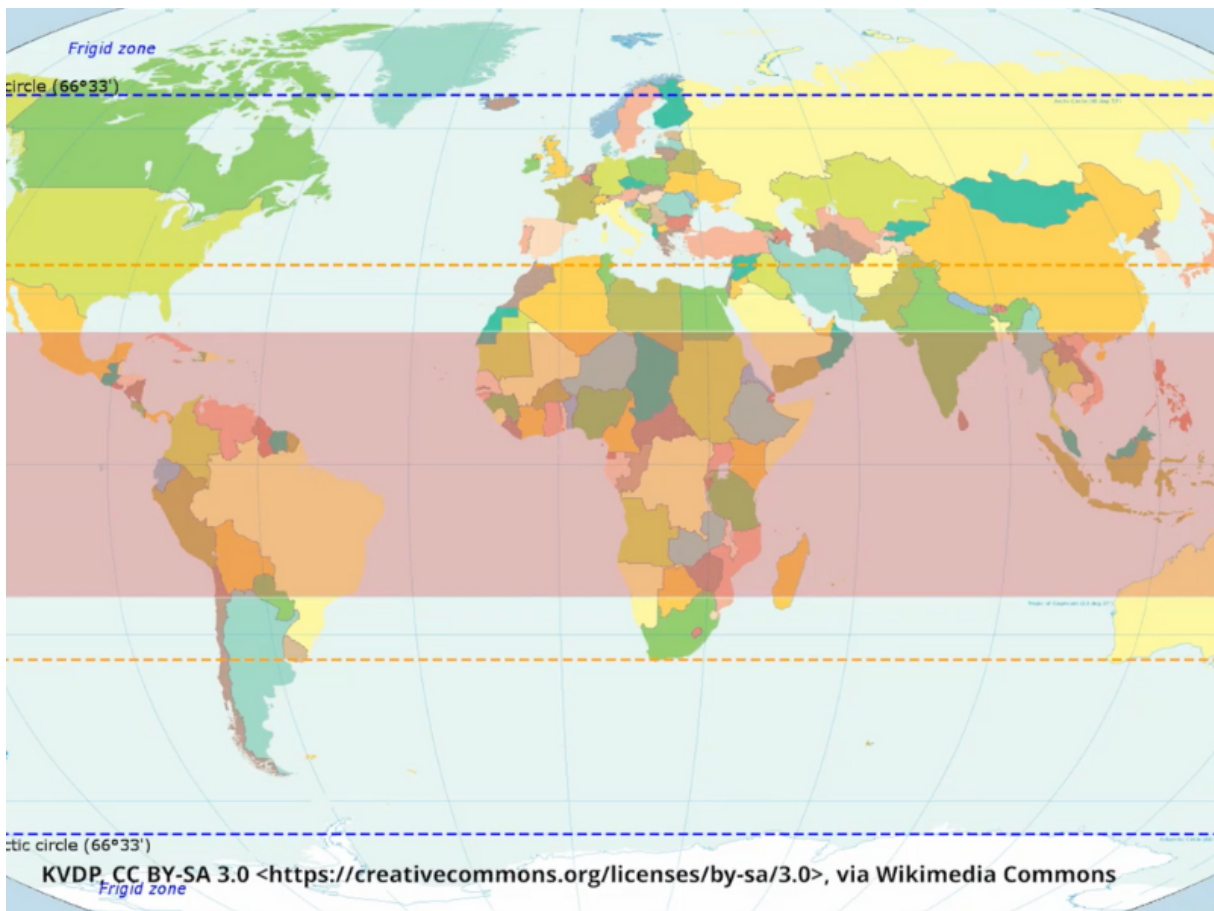
What is Tropical Medicine?

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David Gladow dgladow@tulane.edu

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The tropics are an area characterized by stable temperatures and the greatest biodiversity on the planet, with specific health needs associated with those characteristics.

One of the questions most often received at Tulane University's [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) is a relatively straightforward one: What is tropical medicine?

It is in our name, after all. (And most people already have a basic understanding of public health.)

The answer is slightly more complicated, as tropical medicine is the only medical discipline that is defined by geography, and to understand why that is requires a brief history lesson.

The expansion of European countries in the 19th century included the colonization of areas within the tropics, and that meant exposure to diseases that were unknown in the Northern hemisphere.

The tropics comprise a band around the earth that stretches 23 degrees North and South of the equator, an area that biologically is characterized by stable temperatures and the greatest biodiversity on the planet.

Louisiana, Tulane's home, represents a biome adjacent to the tropics that has components of both temperate and tropical regions, including climates as well as diseases common to both regions.

At the turn of the 20th century, the identification of vector-borne diseases, which were characteristic of the tropics, became one of the elements that set the field apart from others.

The early schools of tropical medicine in Great Britain were established to reduce the burden on taxpayers, as colonial administrators were dying of these diseases. So, the term "tropical medicine" has an association with a colonial background.

Yet, the need to understand and battle diseases characteristic of that particular geography remains, since the region houses the world's poorest and youngest populations, and since the world is highly connected. While chronic illness is increasingly important, it is uniquely appropriate to focus on infectious diseases, which remain more important to these younger populations than those in temperate regions.

What is tropical medicine?

At the Celia Scott Weatherhead School, the focus of our [Department of Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease](#) is to study and combat infectious diseases typical of low- and middle-income countries of the tropics.

You can learn more about earning a [Master of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) degree at the link.

Listen to our Chair of Tropical Medicine, [Dr. Ronald Blanton](#), William Henderson Chair in the Prevention of Tropical Diseases, explain more at the video below.