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Local media and the spread of epidemics: evidence from Ebola in Guinea

Abstract: I study the causal effect of media on the spread of disease, using original data from the Ebola outbreak in Guinea, and quasi-random variation in radio signal reception by distinct media outlets and timing of public health campaigns. Greater access to local radios led to an earlier drop and less infected cases, compared to places with non-local radios. Consistent with a mechanism of coordination in cultural practices, impacts are driven by greater access to radios, accompanied by changing social resistance, treatment uptake and burial practices, but there is no effect on actions that entail no social cost, such as handwashing.