Scientists may have discovered new treatment for Zika virus

SINGAPORE: Scientists from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have come up with a drug that could kill the mosquito-borne Zika virus before severe infection sets in.

The drug, which took six years to develop, was also found to be able to tackle viral infections in the brain – an important feature as Zika typically targets the brain and central nervous system.

Associate Professor Nam-Joon Cho, who is from NTU’s school of materials science and engineering, yesterday said that the new drug is unique because it attacks the physical structure of the Zika virus. Most antiviral drugs work by stopping viruses from replicating, but can become ineffective if a virus mutates.

In contrast, the new peptide drug targets the virus’ membrane, which Prof Cho compared to a balloon.

“Like how a pin pricks a balloon, the peptide pricks a hole in the viral membrane,” he said.

“Prick enough holes, and the virus will be ruptured.”

The study was a collaboration between NTU, the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil, and Ghent University in Belgium. Results were published in the international journal, *Nature Materials*, on Monday. — The Straits Times/Asia News Network