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# Parasites: Hookworm Vaccine Will Be Tried in Africa



Hazel Thompson for The New York Times

Hookworms drain their victims' blood.

By DONALD G. McNEIL Jr.  
Published: October 14, 2013

The first African clinical trial of an experimental vaccine against [hookworm](#) is planned for next year.

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While rarely fatal, [hookworm](#) infestations are a serious problem for 600 million of the world's poor, especially for children going barefoot.

By constantly draining their victims' blood, the worms cause [anemia](#), stunted growth and learning problems, and leave children too weak to go to school. When they infest pregnant women, both mother and fetus are weakened.

The worms enter through the feet and ride the bloodstream to exit in the lungs, where they are coughed up and then swallowed into the intestines. Once there, two sets of teeth help them attach and suck blood. They grow to half an inch long.

Dr. Peter J. Hotez, director of the [Sabin Vaccine Institute](#), [explained](#) that the vaccine creates [antibodies](#) not against the parasites themselves but against two enzymes found in the worm's own gut — one that detoxifies the iron in its blood diet, and another that digests blood proteins. Without those enzymes the worm slowly dies.

The trial will start on a few adults in Gabon, and children will eventually be enrolled. Even if all goes well, the trial could take at least five years. But Dr. Hotez noted that he began work on the vaccine as a graduate student at Rockefeller University 30 years ago "and I've been working on it my whole life."

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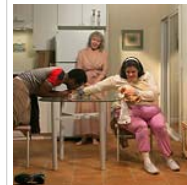
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