

Progress made in Mali and South Sudan toward eradication of dracunculiasis: World Health Organization

Dear Editor,

Dracunculiasis is caused by a nematode worm and is transmitted by drinking stagnant water contaminated with the parasite-infected fleas.^[1] The disease is on the verge of eradication, as observed by more than 80% decline in the number of reported human cases from 126 in 2014 to 22 in 2015.^[1,2] In fact, only four nations (Chad, Mali, South Sudan, and Ethiopia) reported human cases in 2015, which in itself is a big public health achievement.^[1-3]

Moreover, in the year 2016, a total of 25 human cases have been reported, with no case being detected in Mali.^[4] In fact, no case has been reported in Mali after November 2015.^[4] This is a major accomplishment as it was the only nation with evidence of local transmission of the disease in the West African region.^[4] At the same time, Sudan has also confirmed its readiness for the World Health Organization verification for the certification of the eradication of the disease in the nation.^[4]

Nevertheless, a potential risk of reinfection has been anticipated in 12 nations of the African region owing to the substandard water infrastructure and massive population migration in the region.^[1,3,5] Simultaneously, the challenges of identification and containment of the last few cases is a difficult task, especially in regions with security issues and high magnitude of the displaced population.^[2,5] Furthermore, the problem of inadequate funding and the difficulty to identify infection in dogs remains a major challenge for the health professionals.^[1,3] In fact, these needs have been recognized by the international agencies, and they are working together to assist the health stakeholders from these remaining endemic nations to implement the appropriate measures, including encouraging research activities to eventually better understand the dynamics.^[4,5]

Furthermore, to be certified as a disease-free nation, the nation should not report any case of the disease or no

evidence of transmission for three successive years, and that entirely depends on the quality of surveillance.^[1] This is extremely important to ensure that there are no missed cases and nil recurrence of the disease in the nation.^[1,2] In addition, owing to the fact that the incubation period of the causative agent is around 12 months, the detection of even one case will postpone eradication efforts by more than a year.^[1,4,5]

To conclude, dracunculiasis infection can be globally eradicated in the near future. However, to expedite the process of eradication and to prevent the reemergence of the infection, there is a great need for the technical support, collaborative efforts between concerned sectors, and strengthening of the surveillance activities to monitor the achieved progress.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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