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UN health agency: eradication of guinea-worm disease on track as number of cases drops



Health worker during community awareness campaign, showing guinea worm disease flipchart.
Photo: WHO/Agum J

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The United Nations health agency is [reporting](#) a continuing decline in the number of guinea worm cases – one of two diseases, along with polio, that it says is slated for eradication.

The number of guinea-worm disease cases has dropped from 3,190 in 2009 to just under 396 cases during the first six months of 2012, according to the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).

Guinea-worm disease is a crippling parasitic ailment caused by *Dracunculus medinensis*, a long thread-like worm, and is transmitted when people drink water contaminated with parasite-infected water fleas.

Cases of the disease, also known as dracunculiasis, occurred in only four countries in 2011 – Chad, Ethiopia, Mali and South Sudan.

Gautam Biswas of WHO's Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases told a news conference in Geneva that 99 per cent of cases today occur in the world's newest country, South Sudan, which has committed to interrupting transmission by 2013.

Dr. Biswas added that aggressive public health and hygiene awareness among the communities where the disease is still endemic is vital to eradicating it.

“There is no vaccine needed to prevent or even there is no medicine available,” he stated. “The key to eradication is first very good surveillance to detect every case and once the case is detected to try and contain the case so that they do not infect others through drinking water sources, provision of drinking water and the treatment of the ponds.”

He added, “The only constraint that we see is insecurity which results in population movement from their villages or the access to the health services are problematic due to insecurity.”

The WHO official also noted that after the detection of the last case, surveillance must be continued for three years to prove that there are no more cases.

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