

Working to Eradicate A Painful Parasite

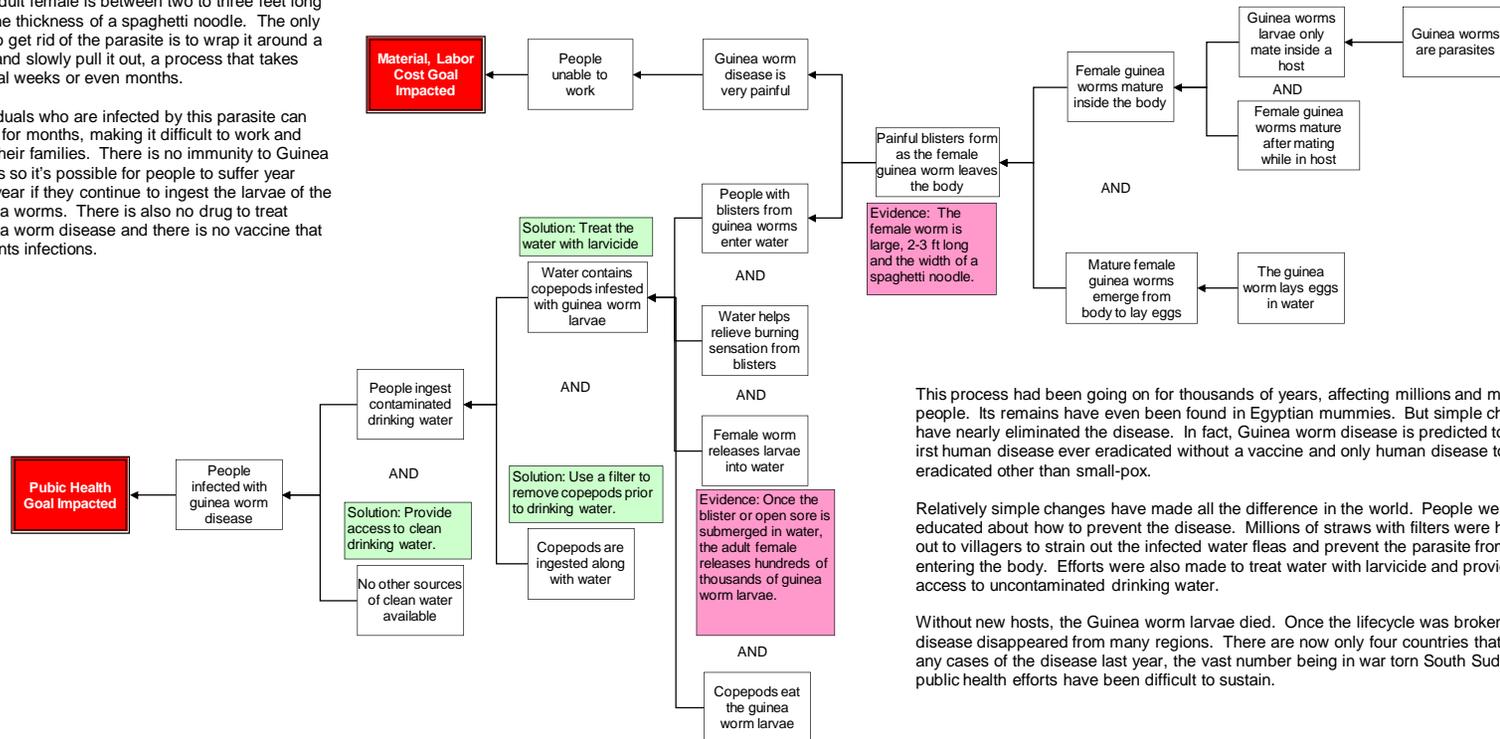
The Fight Against The Guinea Worm Disease

The lifecycle of the Guinea worm is the stuff of nightmares. This parasite is ingested by a host as larvae, mate and mature inside the host and then the adult female painfully emerges to lay her eggs. The adult female is between two to three feet long and the thickness of a spaghetti noodle. The only way to get rid of the parasite is to wrap it around a stick and slowly pull it out, a process that takes several weeks or even months.

Individuals who are infected by this parasite can suffer for months, making it difficult to work and feed their families. There is no immunity to Guinea worms so it's possible for people to suffer year after year if they continue to ingest the larvae of the Guinea worms. There is also no drug to treat Guinea worm disease and there is no vaccine that prevents infections.

In 1986 there were an estimated 3.5 million cases of Guinea worm disease spread across 21 countries in Asia and Africa.

In 2011, there were only 1,058 reported cases of Guinea worm disease in four African countries.



This process had been going on for thousands of years, affecting millions and millions of people. Its remains have even been found in Egyptian mummies. But simple changes have nearly eliminated the disease. In fact, Guinea worm disease is predicted to be the first human disease ever eradicated without a vaccine and only human disease to be eradicated other than small-pox.

Relatively simple changes have made all the difference in the world. People were educated about how to prevent the disease. Millions of straws with filters were handed out to villagers to strain out the infected water fleas and prevent the parasite from entering the body. Efforts were also made to treat water with larvicide and provide access to uncontaminated drinking water.

Without new hosts, the Guinea worm larvae died. Once the lifecycle was broken, the disease disappeared from many regions. There are now only four countries that reported any cases of the disease last year, the vast number being in war torn South Sudan where public health efforts have been difficult to sustain.

Cause Map High Level

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