



The Fiery Serpent and Ordination of Medical Personnel: Priests for Healing and Saving

What is the Fiery Serpent, the Bronze Serpent, the Brazen Serpent?

The eradication of a dangerous parasitic worm!

Are physicians, nurses, dentists, scientists Priests?

Dracunculiasis is the first parasitic disease close to eradication!

Let's start with the 'serpent' a parasitic worm named *Dracunculus medinensis*, the Guinea Worm, fiery serpent...



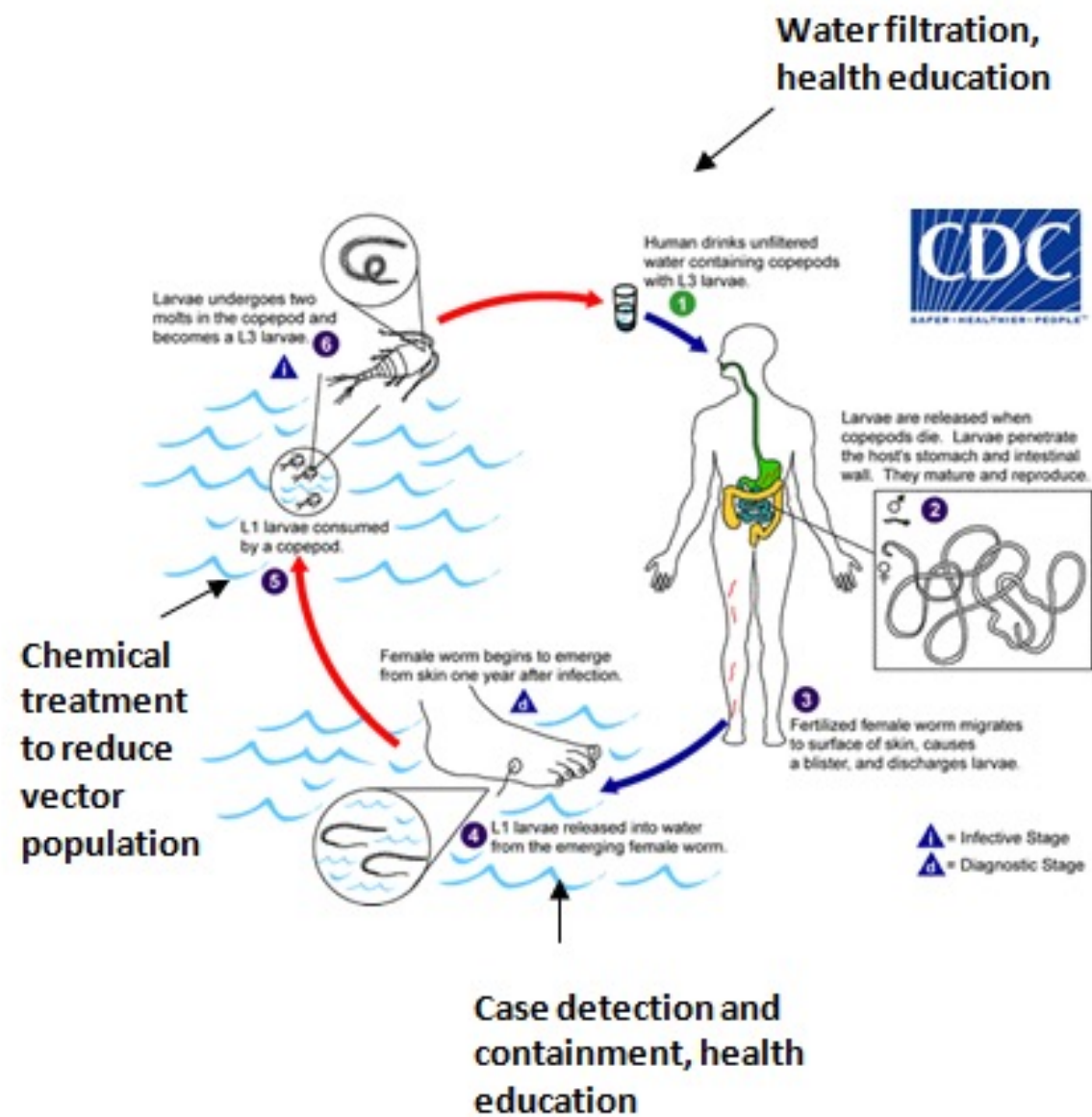
Annual Cases of Guinea Worm Worldwide

Guinea worm is almost eradicated



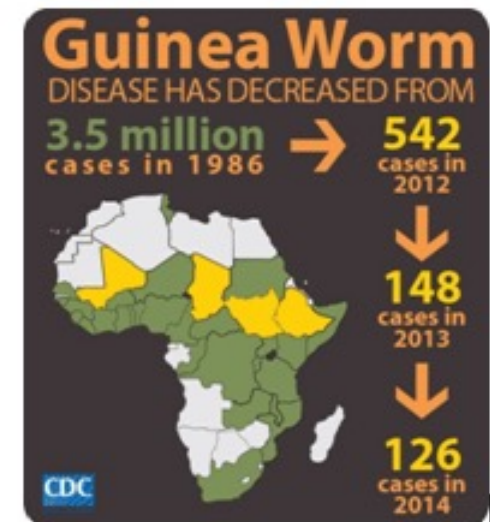
**Maybe 15 human cases in 2021.
45 million in 1946**





Key facts

- Dracunculiasis is a crippling parasitic disease on the verge of eradication, with 27 human cases reported in 2020.
- From the time infection occurs, it takes between **10–14 months** for the transmission cycle to complete. About this time, a mature female worm emerges from the body.
- The parasite is transmitted mostly when people drink stagnant water contaminated with parasite-infected water fleas.
- Dracunculiasis was endemic in 20 countries in the mid-1980s. Now down to 4.





Without drugs or a vaccine, the simple technology of a 'straw' with a filter allows people to drink water and not be infected!



Ideas & support:
Carter Center,
CDC, WHO



Guinea Worm Extraction

Guinea worms are acquired from drinking contaminated water. When the adult female worms migrate to subcutaneous tissues to form a blister, the extraction process can begin.

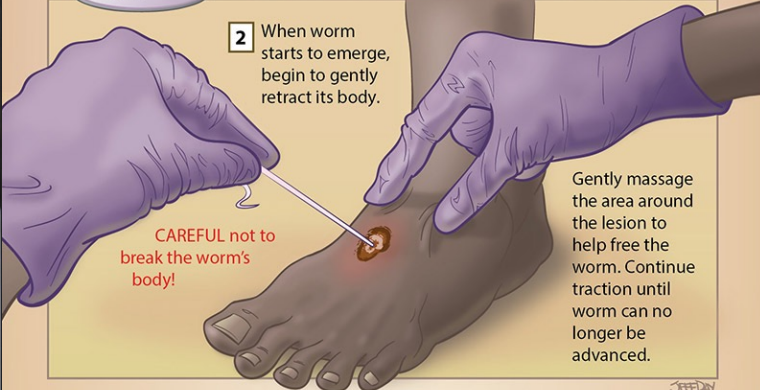
- 1 Soak blistered region in container of water daily to coax the worm out.



Discard the contaminated water far from any drinking water source.

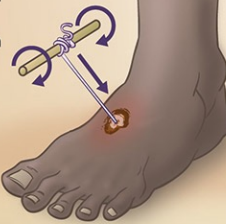


- 2 When worm starts to emerge, begin to gently retract its body.



Gently massage the area around the lesion to help free the worm. Continue traction until worm can no longer be advanced.

- 3 Wrap worm around a stick to maintain tension on its body.



- 4 Apply topical antibiotics to prevent secondary infections and cover the wound with clean dressings.



Repeat steps 1-4 daily until entire worm is removed. Worm may be up to a meter long and removal may last several weeks.

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Why care about the fiery serpent?

- As a child, I remember sermons to NOT have any idols or make any 'graven' image of an animal.
- And yet another sermon would mention the bronze serpent and the need to approach this pole to be miraculously cured/saved.
- Why was this image of, something created, good to approach? To seek forgiveness from? To bow down to?
- It seems to be or appears to be a graven image.

- Taking my first parasitology class in graduate school, the instructor made a simple aside, that the guinea worm was the fiery serpent.
- Could this 'general' knowledge among parasitologists explain my confusion?
- And could this worm be the symbol of medicine?
- The guinea worm best fits and completes the biblical story and the many theological ideas and concepts.

A Possible Story of what happened

- The exodus from Egypt was a long ordeal. The discontent and rebellion against God and Moses led to problems. Those 'thirsty' for water disobeyed and drank from a source that was 'unsafe.'
- Then, a while later, those same complainers (isn't it usually the same group?) were unhappy and God sent (or did he really just ALLOW) the serpent to appear in these disobedient people with the bite marks (lesions) and the fiery pain (often leading to infection).
- Those infected had to seek out the tents, marked by the serpent 'signpost,' approach, ask forgiveness, and accept the long and uncomfortable treatment while in pain.
- Healing was not magic, but a medical procedure using the knowledge and wisdom the Lord provided.

- In the death of the worm on the stick, we can understand the death of Jesus on the 'tree' or cross.
- In both, the death leads to healing, to salvation
- When the worm is fully wound onto the stick, it is then held up to show the completion of the act of healing, and Jesus was raised on the 'tree' to complete his death.
- In erecting the bronze serpent, it was a guidepost or sign, to where to come, ask for forgiveness. To allow the 'priest' who was given the medical knowledge and wisdom, to spend many days slowly and gently pulling the worm onto the stick.

- We do not just look at Jesus on the cross in traditional Christianity, we must believe, accept, ask for forgiveness and act. (Faith without works ['action'] is dead).
- Sin, represented by the worm, must be removed from the body in true healing.
- If the brass (bronze, brazen) serpent is considered to be a symbol of Jesus on the cross, this would make Jesus on the cross represent Nehushtan.
- This is a derogatory name for the bronze serpent, which due to idolatrous worship, was destroyed by King Hezekiah

- Those given the knowledge and skills to heal were the Levites/priests and it is common for priests to be healers.
- **I would propose that those who heal are ordained (or consecrated) to this ministry. Healing, medicine in all of its forms, is a ministry. It is spiritual work, a calling. We act for God by facilitating healing.**



Caduceus vs Rod of Asclepius – Medical Symbol

- Caduceus – symbol of Hermes or Mercury, protector of thieves and merchants, a messenger (2 snakes)
- Asclepius – the Greek god of healing (1 serpent)
- Can ‘snakes’ represent healing? Or can the parasite wrapped around the stick, removed from the patient who is thus healed, be a better symbol of medicine?
 - Does the fact, that early Greeks knew of the Guinea worm and how to extract it, lead to the Rod of Asclepius being a better symbol?

