



## HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

# Despite Success, More Work to be Done Fighting Guinea Worm

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The Carter Center said recently that only 13 human cases of Guinea **worm** disease were reported worldwide last year. That is a major drop from 3.5 million cases of infected people in 1986.

These early numbers are expected to be confirmed in the coming months. Still, the Carter Center, founded by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Eleanor Rosalynn Carter, said the last part of the international effort to end the **parasitic** disease will be “the most difficult.”

Guinea worm is a disease that affects poor communities in distant parts of Africa and Asia that do not have safe water to drink. People who drink unclean water can get parasites that can grow up to 1 meter. The worm grows in people for up to a year before painfully coming out, often through the feet or other sensitive parts of the body.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says there is neither a drug treatment for Guinea worm disease nor a vaccine to prevent it. Guinea worm disease can be prevented by training people to **filter** and drink clean water.

In 1986, the Atlanta-based Carter Center joined the WHO and UNICEF in the fight against Guinea worm disease. The center said the remaining infections occurred in four countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Six human cases were reported in Chad, five in South Sudan, one in Ethiopia and one in the Central African Republic. The Central African Republic case remains under investigation.

Adam Weiss is the director of The Carter Center's Guinea Worm Eradication Program. Weiss told The Associated Press that the final efforts to eradicate, or completely end, the disease could be difficult.

Weiss said the populations where Guinea worm still exists often face insecurity, including conflict, which can prevent workers and volunteers from going house to house to offer support.

Weiss cautioned if support for these communities slows or stops "there's no question that you're going to see a **surge** in Guinea worm." He added, "We're continuing to make progress, even if it is not as fast as we all want it to be, but that progress continues."

Guinea worm could be the second human disease to be ended after smallpox, says The Carter Center.

I'm John Russell.

*Alex Sanz reported on this story for the Associated Press. John Russell adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**worm** – *n.* an infection or a disease caused by tiny worms that live inside the body of an animal or person

**parasite** – *n.* an animal or plant that lives in or on another animal or plant and gets food or protection from it

**filter** – *v.* to pass (something, such as a gas or liquid) through a filter to remove something unwanted

**surge** – *n.* a sudden, large increase

