



PRESS RELEASE

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MAPPING THIS WORMY WORLD

New global atlas will transform deworming programmes

Maps showing the distribution and prevalence of worm infections in every African country will be launched today (17 August). These maps, called This Wormy World www.thiswormyworld.org, are the first of a series of *Global Atlas of Helminth Infections* which provide a unique, open-access, free information resource vital for planning and implementing deworming programmes.

It is estimated that more than 400 million children worldwide are infected with worms (helminths), 90 million in Africa alone. Worms damage children's health, nutrition and educational achievement. Infections are most prevalent in poor communities where there is inadequate sanitation. The most common worm infections are soil-transmitted helminths (roundworm, whipworm and hookworm) and schistosomiasis.

This Wormy World identifies areas in a country that most urgently require mass treatment to control infection and predicts the risk of infection in areas where data is lacking. *The Global Atlas of Helminth Infections* has been produced by an international collaboration lead by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Partnership for Child Development at Imperial College London. For a decade, the group has been gathering survey data to describe the distribution and prevalence of worm infection.

Announcing This Wormy World at the 12th International Congress of Parasitology in Melbourne, Australia, founder of the project, Dr Simon Brooker from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK and KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme, Kenya, said, "Worm control is like a journey. The extent and location of the problem need to be mapped out in order to get treatment to where it is needed most. Until recently, much worm control has been a journey without reliable maps."

Worms can be controlled with safe, cheap and single-dose drugs and treatment is most effective with improvements in sanitation and health education. All too often, however, scarce resources are wasted because deworming programmes are targeted at the wrong

communities. Until now, the information that policy makers and public health professionals need to plan their strategies has not been easily accessible.

This Wormy World is unique because it brings together all the available information in one standardised, geo-referenced database. "Our aim with the atlas is to provide up-to-date, reliable maps for those involved in practical control, especially in Africa where information is lacking," said Dr Brooker.

"Around one quarter of the Ugandan population is at risk of worm infections. The atlas shows in great detail the communities that are most and least affected. Therefore, targeting our deworming programmes accurately could make a dramatic difference to the health and education of adults and children in our country," said Dr Narcis Kabatereine, head of Neglected Tropical Disease Control Programme, Ugandan Ministry of Health.

The atlas initially focuses on infections in Africa, where the burden of worms and the need for reliable maps is greatest. The group plans to produce similar maps for all other countries in the world by the end of 2010. The longer-term goal is to produce a global atlas of all neglected tropical diseases, including lymphatic filariasis and river blindness (onchocerciasis) and work is already underway to develop a Global Atlas of Trachoma, in collaboration with the International Trachoma Initiative. The goal supports the recent commitment of the Obama administration to provide more than US\$100 million annually for neglected tropical disease.

"Good health is essential for learning. Programmes that improve children's health can be among the most cost-effective ways to improve education outcomes in poor communities," said Donald Bundy from The World Bank, USA, co-founder with Dr Brooker of This Wormy World. "This first atlas of worm infections in African countries is a major step forward in tackling neglected tropical diseases throughout the world."

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Photographs are available from Elaine Snell or Francis Peel – above.

The Global Atlas of Helminth Infections is produced by a collaboration of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine <http://www.lshtm.ac.uk>; the Partnership for Child Development at Imperial College, London www.child-development.org; Deworm the World; Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI)-Wellcome Trust Research Programme; and the World Health Organization. It is funded by the Partnership for Child Development and the Wellcome Trust, UK.

Other partners include the Focusing Resources on Effective School Health; Education-for-All Fast Track Initiative; Schistosomiasis Control Initiative; Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases; and the Malaria Atlas Project.

Worm (helminth) infections are some of the most common infections of humans. Chronic, long-term and intense infection with soil-transmitted helminths and schistosomes can hold back children's physical and mental development and learning. Simple deworming drugs can prevent these negative consequences, and delivering these inexpensive pills by mass treatment of schoolchildren has been shown to work and be cost-effective.

Dr Simon Brooker is Reader in Tropical Epidemiology and Disease Control at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and a Wellcome Trust research fellow. He is currently based in Nairobi at the Kenya Medical Research Institute–Wellcome Trust Research Programme <http://www.kemri-wellcome.org/> where he coordinates a programme of research on the epidemiology and control of worms and malaria in schools. Simon Brooker is funded by a research career development fellowship from the Wellcome Trust.

The XIIth International Congress of Parasitology (ICOPA) will be held in Melbourne, Australia, 15-20 August. The theme of the congress is "Understanding the global impact of parasites-from genomes to function and disease" <http://www.icopaxii.org/> . **Dr Simon Brooker** is will give a Plenary Lecture on 17 August, 8:30am on 'Mapping the global distribution of human parasitism,' abstract number 67