

Alcoholism drug may help design HIV cure, study says

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HIV (yellow) infecting a human immune cell. Credit: Seth Pincus, Elizabeth Fischer and Austin Athman, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health

A treatment for alcoholism can reactivate dormant HIV, potentially allowing other drugs to spot and kill the virus hiding out in human immune cells, researchers said Tuesday.

The medication, called Disulfiram, draws out the AIDS-causing virus without any side effects for patients, according to a study published in *The Lancet*.

In people undergoing [treatment](#) for AIDS, the virus can take cover in certain cells and hide away, only to reemerge once therapy is stopped.

This latency has been one of the biggest hurdles in developing a cure.

"Waking up" the virus - and then destroying it—is a promising strategy for ridding patients of HIV.

But other drugs which are able to rouse HIV from its dormant state are toxic to humans.

In clinical trials led by Sharon Lewin, a professor at the University of Melbourne, 30 people on [antiretroviral treatment](#) (ART) were given increasing doses of Disulfiram over a period of three days.

At the highest dose, there was evidence of slumbering HIV being stimulated, with no side effects.

"This trial clearly demonstrates that Disulfiram is not toxic and is safe to use, and could quite possibly be the game changer we need," Lewin said in a statement.

The next step will be to test Disulfiram's rousing effect in combination with a virus-killing drug.

"Waking up the [virus](#) is only the first step to eliminating it," said the study's lead author Julian Elliott, head of clinical research in the department of infectious diseases at Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, Australia.

"Now we need to work out how to get rid of the infected cell."

Approximately 34 million people have died of HIV-related causes worldwide. By the end of 2014, there were an estimated 36.9 [people](#) living with HIV globally.

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