

Worm treatment strategy could benefit millions of kids

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Dr Naomi Clarke and Dr Susana Vaz Nery. Credit: Jamie Kidston, ANU

A landmark new study shows the benefits of an expanded treatment strategy for intestinal worms - treating adults as well as children - that could improve the health of millions of children in Southeast Asia, the Pacific and Africa.

Dr Naomi Clarke from ANU said children from the poorest

communities suffered from consequences of infestations, such as poor growth and development, and chronic intestinal blood loss and anaemia in some cases.

"About 880 million children around the world are exposed to [intestinal worms](#). Children with intestinal worms may not develop to their full physical and intellectual capacity. This makes it harder to break the poverty cycle," said Dr Clarke, a PhD student from the ANU Research School of Population Health.

"These worms are no longer common in Australia, but they do infect some people in remote Indigenous communities in northern Australia."

Dr Clarke said intestinal worms were a major health problem in developing countries, including many that receive Australian aid in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Senior researcher Dr Susana Vaz Nery from ANU said while global guidelines mainly recommended deworming treatment for children, the new study found worm prevention was likely to be more effective when the whole community was dewormed.

"This is the first time that researchers have shown that expanding medication programs to all community members will likely lead to improved control of intestinal worms in [children](#)," said Dr Vaz Nery from the ANU Research School of Population Health.

The research team is conducting follow-up research in East Timor.

"We'll present our findings to the World Health Organization and advocate for new policies that will improve the health and welfare of people in the world's poorest communities," Dr Vaz Nery said.

The research is published in *The Lancet*.

More information: Naomi E Clarke et al. Differential effect of mass deworming and targeted deworming for soil-transmitted helminth control in children: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *The Lancet* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)32123-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)32123-7)

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