

Breakthrough finding brings cure for flesh-eating skin disease one step closer

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Scientists from the University of Surrey have made an important breakthrough in the fight against the flesh-eating tropical [skin disease](#) Buruli ulcer, by their discovery that the bacteria causes a blood clot in patients' skin, similar to those that cause [deep vein thrombosis](#) (DVT). The new findings mean that, like DVT, the clots may respond to anticoagulant medicines, heal more quickly and with fewer side effects than with antibiotics alone.

Publishing their research today in the journal *PLoS Pathogens*, the team hopes this major discovery will accelerate the development of a cure for this chronic debilitating disease which affects poor communities in West Africa, and can lead to permanent disfigurement and disability. The World Health Organization considers Buruli ulcer to be an emerging threat to public health.

"This is a huge breakthrough in our understanding of the disease," said lead author Dr Rachel Simmonds from the University of Surrey.

"Buruli ulcer is an emerging tropical disease, which is caused by infection with *Mycobacterium ulcerans*, an organism which belongs to the family of bacteria that causes tuberculosis and leprosy. Around 5,000 cases are recorded each year, the majority in poor rural communities in West Africa, Australia and Southeast Asia where the infection is thought to occur when people bath in slow running water.

"While antibiotics are currently used to treat Buruli ulcer, they take a long time to work and few people with the disease can afford to pay for extended stays in hospital. The ulcers are often painless, and as a result, early signs of infection are ignored, or thought to be a 'curse'. Infected people, often children, are treated by traditional healers rather than modern medicine.

"We hope our research will now enable better treatment combinations that will reduce the lifetime deformity patients have to bear."

Provided by University of Surrey

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