

For First Time, AIDS Vaccine Shows Some Success

By DONALD G. McNEIL Jr./New York Times
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Scientists said Thursday that a new **AIDS** vaccine, the first ever declared to protect a significant minority of humans against the disease, would be studied to answer two fundamental questions: why it worked in some people but not in others, and why those infected despite vaccination got no benefit at all.

The vaccine — known as RV 144, a combination of two genetically engineered vaccines, neither of which had worked before in humans — was declared a qualified success after a six-year clinical trial on more than 16,000 volunteers in Thailand. Those who were vaccinated became infected at a rate nearly one-third lower than the others, the sponsors said Thursday morning.

“I don’t want to use a word like ‘breakthrough,’ but I don’t think there’s any doubt that this is a very important result,” said Dr. **Anthony S. Fauci**, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which is one of the trial’s backers.

“For more than 20 years now, vaccine trials have essentially been failures,” Dr. Fauci said. “Now it’s like we were groping down an unlit path, and a door has been opened. We can start asking some very important questions.” It will still, however, take years of work before a vaccine that could end the epidemic, which has killed about 25 million people, can even be contemplated.

“We often talk about whether a vaccine is even possible,” said Mitchell Warren, the executive director of the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition, or AVAC. “This is not the vaccine that ends the epidemic and says, ‘O.K., let’s move on to something else.’ But it’s a fabulous new step that takes us in a new direction.” In which direction is still unknown. No one knows why the vaccine gave even its weak indicator of success.

Experts generally disdain vaccines that do not protect at least 70 to 80 percent of those getting them. And this vaccine did not lower the viral loads of people who were vaccinated but caught the virus anyway, which was baffling because even mismatched vaccines usually do that.

Simply repeating the trial to confirm the results would be pointless, experts agreed.

The trial, the largest AIDS vaccine trial in history, cost \$105 million and followed 16,402 Thai volunteers.

The men and women ages 18 to 30 were recruited from two provinces southeast of the capital, Bangkok, from the general population rather than from high-risk groups like drug injectors or sex workers. Half got six doses of two different vaccines; half were given placebos.

For ethical reasons, all were offered **condoms**, taught how to avoid infection and promised lifelong antiretroviral treatment if they got AIDS. They were then regularly tested for three years; 74 of those who got placebos became infected, but only 51 of those who got the vaccines did.

Although the difference was a mere 23 people, Col. Jerome H. Kim, a physician and the manager of the [Army's](#) H.I.V. vaccine program, said it was statistically significant and meant that the vaccine was 31.2 percent effective.

The results were surprising because both vaccines, one from the French company Sanofi-Aventis and one developed by Genentech but now licensed to [Global Solutions for Infectious Diseases](#), a nonprofit health group, had failed when used individually.

“This came out of the blue,” said Chris Viehbacher, Sanofi’s chief executive. Even 31 percent protection “was at least twice as good as our own internal experts were predicting,” he added.

In 2004, there was so much skepticism about the trial just after it began that 22 top AIDS researchers published [an editorial in Science magazine](#) suggesting that it was a waste of money.

One conclusion from the surprising result, said Alan Bernstein, head of the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise, an alliance of organizations pursuing a vaccine, “is that we’re not doing enough work in humans.” Instead of going back to mice or monkeys, he said, different new variants on the two vaccines could be tried on a few hundred people in several countries.

This vaccine was designed to combat the most common strain of the virus in Southeast Asia, so it would have to be modified for the strains circulating in Africa and the United States.

Sanofi’s vaccine, Alvac-HIV, is a canarypox virus with three AIDS virus genes grafted onto it. Variations of it were tested in several countries; it was safe but not protective.

The other vaccine, Aidsvax, was originally made by Genentech and contains a protein found on the surface of the AIDS virus; it is grown in a broth of hamster ovary cells. It was tested in Thai drug users in 2003 and in gay men in North America and Europe but failed.

In 2007, two trials of a Merck vaccine in about 4,000 people were stopped early; it not only failed to work but for some men also seemed to increase the risk of infection. Combining Alvac and Aidsvax was simply a hunch: if one was designed to create [antibodies](#) and the other to alert white blood cells, might they work together?

One puzzling result — those who became infected had as much virus in their blood whether they got the vaccine or a placebo — suggests that RV 144 does not produce neutralizing antibodies, as most vaccines do, Dr. Fauci said. Antibodies are Y-shaped proteins formed by the body that clump onto invading viruses, blocking the surface spikes with which they attach to cells and flagging them for destruction.

Instead, he theorized, it might produce “binding antibodies,” which latch onto and empower effector cells, a type of white blood cell attacking the virus. Therefore, he said, it might make sense to screen all the stored Thai blood samples for binding antibodies. “The humbling prospect of this,” he said, “is that we may not even be measuring the critical parameter. It may be something you don’t normally associate with protection.”

Dr. Lawrence Corey, the principal investigator for the [HIV Vaccine Trials Network](#), who was not part of the RV 144 trial, said new work on weakened versions of the [smallpox](#) vaccine had produced better pox “spines” that could be substituted for the canarypox. New trials, he added, could be faster and smaller if they were done in African countries where AIDS is more common than in Thailand.

SPIRIT OF THE OLD WEST TRAIN RIDE

STAP is hosting a Spirit of the Old West Train Ride on Saturday, October 10, 2009. Clients from the Delaware/Otsego region have requested this exciting event and STAP has listened! This event is open to all STAP clients and their immediate family. Participants will enjoy a train ride through Charlotte Valley Railroad during the height of New York's beautiful foliage season. A boxed lunch will be provided to participants. Transportation to/from the Railroad is not provided. If you are interested in attending this event please call STAP today at 1-800-333-0892 and reserve your space. Space is limited.

DOGGONE ON THE RUN!! Saturday, October 3rd/Raindate - Sunday, October 4th

A 2-mile fundraising Walk, individuals and teams of five or more people collect donations to benefit the PAWS (Pets are Wonderful Support) program and clients of the Southern Tier AIDS Program.

Walk at 11:00 AM/Followed by a fantastic post party.....**Party Agenda:** Music courtesy of **The Parlor Cats!**/Agility courtesy of **Myrph's Dog Training!**/Blessing of the Animals/Games/Raffle Prizes/Vendors/K9 Demonstration/Musical Mats/Doggie Da Vincis/Prizes/Contest...Plus a few surprises

Hospitality Sponsors are Outback Steakhouse, Starbucks & Frito Lay. THANK YOU!!

DON'T BE LEFT ON THE PORCH! REGISTER TODAY at STAP. Call Candace for information and registration.

FREE CONCERT IN SIDNEY

Every Other Friday Night (6:30pm-6pm)Sidney, New York (July 10 - October 30)
1st Annual Friday River Fest/Whitaker's Lot next to Main St. Bridge, Sidney, NY
Free Concerts, multiple performers each event / Visit www.fridayriverfest.com for list of performers

WORLD AIDS DAY EVENT

Come Together and Make a Difference!!! The 2009 World AIDS Day Event will be held on Friday, December 4 from 6PM-9PM. The event will be held at Binghamton University in the Downtown Center Atrium. It will be an evening of art, music and action. There will be a special show and sale of jewelry that were handcrafted by women living with HIV/AIDS in Kenya. All proceeds directly benefit the Jifahamu Kenya Foundation. This event is supported by STAP. **SAVE THE DATE!!!!**

Managing Drug Resistance (Part 3 of 3)

From the Medical Advocate's Office: When Should Drug-resistance Tests Be Used?

HIV treatment guidelines, including those produced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the International AIDS Society-USA (IAS-USA), recommend drug-resistance testing for all HIV-positive people. Here's a look at when these tests should be used:

- **When HIV is first diagnosed.** Knowing if you've been infected with a drug-resistant strain of HIV—and which drugs your virus is resistant to—can be very helpful. For the most accurate results, you should be tested for HIV drug resistance soon after you are diagnosed as HIV positive, even if you won't be starting treatment for several months or years (the information will be recorded in your medical file and help guide treatment when the time comes).
- **If treatment doesn't appear to be working.** If your viral load fails to become undetectable after a new treatment regimen is started, or becomes detectable again after a period of being undetectable, drug-resistance testing may help determine the cause. For best results, the test should be conducted while you are on your regimen—provided that your viral load is detectable—or within four weeks of discontinuing treatment. If no drug resistance is found, the problem might be related to poor treatment adherence, the way your body is absorbing the drugs, or drug–drug interactions. It is best to address these problems before resistance mutations develop. If drug resistance is found, these tests can help determine which medications have stopped working for you (people rarely develop resistance to all three or four drugs being taken) and also help figure out which medications to switch to.
- **During pregnancy.** If you are HIV positive and become pregnant, the most effective way to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to your baby is to get your viral load undetectable and keep it there—at least until your baby is born. Drug-resistance testing before and during treatment can help achieve this important goal.

How Can Drug Resistance Be Avoided?

There are a number of steps that HIV-positive people can take to prevent—or at least slow down—the development of resistance:

- **Learn all you can about HIV treatment and the available options.** The more you know, the easier it will be to make treatment choices that help you avoid drug resistance.
- **Start treatment with a powerful HIV regimen.** Your first shot at HIV treatment is probably your best chance at fully suppressing the virus and preventing the development of drug resistance.
- **Be sure to follow instructions.** It is very important that HIV-positive people take their HIV medications exactly as prescribed. Missing doses and not taking the right number of pills can cause viral load to increase and cause drug-resistance mutations to develop.
- **Communicate with your doctor.** Knowing how to take your medicine properly and reporting any problems to your doctor are important for avoiding drug resistance.
- **Monitor the effects of your treatment.** This means keeping an eye on your viral load and other lab tests after you begin treatment and for as long as you remain on therapy. Every three months is a standard recommendation. Often an increasing viral load—or a viral load that fails to go undetectable—is the first sign that drug resistance is developing. Monitoring viral load is a good way to guard against drug resistance.

I hope you've found some (or even all!) of this information helpful. And don't forget that I am always available to answer your questions about HIV and treatment options. After all, that's my job! James Elrod, STAP Medical Advocate/607-426-9445, jelrod@stapinc.org

POSITIVE STEPS FORUM

The Consumer Involvement Committee of the Ryan White HIV Care Network of Northeastern New York is pleased to announce the upcoming event:

HIV Treatment Update Forum with a Focus on Complementary Therapies

9am to 3pm on Tuesday, October 13th, 2009 at the Hilton Garden Inn (Adjacent to the Albany Medical Center) On New Scotland Ave., Albany, NY.

The forum is free and open to all who are either infected or affected by HIV. Lunch will be provided free of charge and door prizes will be presented at the end of the day. We ask that participants register in advance by contacting Liz Bradford at (518) 689-0880.

In order to facilitate consumer participation, the Network can provide assistance for transportation to the Forum, generally through reimbursement for travel or by carpooling with other attendees. Resources are limited, so we ask that clients requiring assistance contact us by/or around **October 2nd** to allow us time to coordinate with others and to ensure that they are reimbursed the day of the forum. Please contact Shannon if you need additional information.

Shannon Mason/Ryan White HIV Care Network of Northeastern New York CARES Inc, - 85 Watervliet Ave./Albany, NY 12206/518-689-0880

FALL EVENTS FOR TEENS AT THE BROOME COUNTY LIBRARY

The following groups and events are being offered to teens for the month of October and November: Library Open Mic Night/October 19 6PM/Share a reading of your work or another author's in a coffeehouse type atmosphere.

Make Your Own SlideShow With PowerPoint/November 17 6PM/Want to impress your teacher with a great presentation? Have some digital photos you want to show off? Come and learn how. These events are for youth ages 13-18 and are held at the Broome County Public Library at 185 Court Street, Binghamton. For more information, please call 607-778-6456.

FREE CELL PHONES

There is a government sponsored program available that can provide you with a free cell phone and 68 free minutes per month. Eligibility is based on your participation in one of several State or government programs like PUBLIC HOUSING, FOOD STAMPS, MEDICAID and more. There is also a limit to the amount of income you receive each month. This program is called LifeLine Assistance and you can find out about it through safelink.com or calling 1-800-378-1684. If you need help with the application process, please call your STAP case manager for assistance.

ON-GOING MEETINGS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

JOIN CONSUMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE [CAC] MEETINGS

The STAP Consumer Advisory Committee is a committee facilitated by and made up of consumers (STAP clients) who welcome other consumers and their significant others, caretakers and family members to join them on the second Tuesday of each month. This collaborative effort provides a confidential space for clients to make recommendations regarding STAP client services and other programs in a non-judgmental environment.

The meetings are held following the Friends Dinner at 6:15 at Trinity Memorial Church (on the corner of Main & Oak Streets) in downtown Binghamton.

Call 1-800-333-0892 for directions or more details. If you cannot attend these meetings, mail your opinions or suggestions to STAP, 122 Baldwin Street, Johnson City, 13790, Attention CAC. CAC is encouraging consumers in other counties to organize monthly meetings in their area. Contact your case manager to discuss developing CAC in your community.

THE DRAGON SLAYERS

Hepatitis C and Co-Infection Support Group. Meetings at 6:00 – 7:00PM on alternate Tuesdays at Trinity M, 44 Main Street, Oak Street Entrance in Binghamton. For information, call (607) 798-1706.

FRIENDS DINNER

Friends meet every Tuesday evening for a time of fellowship and good food. Join us at Trinity Memorial Church (on the corner of Main & Oak Streets) in downtown Binghamton. Doors open at 5PM and dinner is served between 5:30 & 5:45. No charge, just come with a smile and a friendly attitude – ready to meet and greet friends and have a hearty meal.

Parking is available on Oak Street behind the Church Annex. Use the Oak Street entrance for the cafeteria. Free bus passes are available for STAP clients! Call your case manager for details. Bus passes available for transportation to/from the Friends Dinner only. For more information call Bill at 607-724-0103.

FREE ANONYMOUS RAPID HIV TESTING

Walk-in Anonymous testing every Monday from 1:00 – 4:30PM and Thursday from 1:00 – 3:00PM at STAP's office, 122 Baldwin Street, Johnson City, NY. For information and other testing times available through the month, please call (607) 798-1706. Confidential Rapid Testing is also available Friday 9AM- Noon & by Appointment.

ONEONTA SOCIAL GROUP

Oneonta Social Group every Saturday at the First Methodist Church, 66 Chestnut Street in the Dolly Room from 12:30PM-1:30PM. HIV/AIDS and affected welcome – Brunch is between 11:30-1PM. This is not an official STAP Group.

ASK THE MEDICAL ADVOCATE

Have general questions or concerns regarding HIV?
Want to better manage side effects of your HIV medications?
Concerned about interactions between your HIV meds and other meds that you take?
Want to better understand the results of your blood work or other lab tests?
Concerned about HIV exposure risks to your negative partner?
Interested in alternative or complementary therapies for HIV?

STAP's Medical Advocate, James Elrod, is available to answer your questions—by phone, email, or in person—you choose! It's a great way to get a direct, individualized answer to your questions. Contact James at (607) 426-9445, or by email: jelrod@stapinc.org

HOPE DISPENSARY OF THE SOUTHERN TIER

The Hope Dispensary of the Southern Tier, a service provided by Lourdes Hospital, is a new program designed to provide medications to those that are uninsured or underinsured and have a limited income. Here is how you qualify:

1. You must have no prescription coverage
2. Have a photo ID or Social Security Card
3. Bring one of any of the following as proof of income: Pay Stubs or Bank Statement, SSI/SSD paperwork or Unemployment or Pink Slip form from employer.
4. Bring proof of residency – one piece of mail with your name and address, such as a phone bill, NYSEG bill or cable bill.
5. Bring the prescription with you

If you need assistance with providing this information to determine eligibility, they have an onsite Social Worker who can help you with the process. There is a monthly income level that you cannot exceed. The information is listed on the next page.

Family Size and Monthly Income

1 = \$1,805	2 = \$2,428
3 = \$3,052	4 = \$3,675
5 = \$4,298	6 = \$4,922
7 = \$5,545	8 = \$6,168

The Hope Dispensary will verify your information onsite and the Social Worker that is present each day they are open will also provide screenings for financial assistance to access 50% discounted up to possibly free healthcare in the Lourdes network. This is great information!!!

Hope Dispensary does not carry all medications. They do cover HIV medication as well as antidepressants. They do not carry any controlled substances or birth control. If they do not have the medication that you need, they have programs developed so that you might qualify for free medication directly from the pharmaceutical corporations. They use medication samples and generic medications. They are located at 477 State Street in Binghamton and their number is 607-584-9376. They are open Monday through Friday from 10AM – 6PM.

HIV POSITIVE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE LINE STARTING

I wanted to take a moment and tell you of an exciting program that is taking place for HIV Positive persons living in New York State. In April on 2009 the NYS DOH has allowed People Living with HIV in New York State to start a secure dialogue via conference calls. The CNY HIV Care Network facilitates these calls through the Rural Connect initiative. The first group, started in April for HIV Poz Gay Men, conducts calls once a week and is being facilitated by an HIV Poz Gay Man.

Rural Connect recently secured additional phone lines to support a weekly call specific to HIV Positive Women living in NY. Women's calls will be facilitated by an HIV Positive Woman beginning mid-September. Conference calls currently include topics such as disclosure, adherence, access to services, living skills, and barriers to services or any topic that the callers want to bring up! As a person living with HIV, I have found these calls to be helpful in ending isolation particularly to those living in rural areas with little to no transportation. Should you have any questions or suggestions about "Rural Connect" conference calls please contact me either by phone or e-mail.

Paul Carr/Program Assistant/CNY HIV Care Network/315 472-8099/pcarr@cnyhsa.com

New LGBT Information Site Launched

www.asaging.org/larc

The American Society on Aging has created a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Aging Resources Clearinghouse that holds information related to and resources for people aged 50 and older. The site's searchable resources span several categories: education and training; health and mental health; housing and support services; populations and communities; and public policy, advocacy, and legal issues. Also available are annotated listings for service providers, community and professional organizations, information sites, reports and articles, and links for ordering DVDs, books, and other useful products.

PROJECT ATTAIN

The Advanced Technology Training And Information Networking Center holds free classes each month to help people get the training they need to be comfortable using important computer software programs. Call 607-772-4771/www.bul.sunyeoc.org. Classes are FREE!!!!