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Polio vaccines and the origin of AIDS

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Abstract

Although mass vaccination programs have resulted in the eradication of a number of human infectious diseases, vaccine contamination has been a persistent concern. In particular, it is now known that the early polio vaccines were contaminated with at least one monkey virus, SV40. The transfer of monkey viruses to man via contaminated vaccines is particularly relevant to the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), since the causative agent of AIDS, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), is thought to be derived from a simian precursor virus. Furthermore, human infection with this virus appears to be a relatively recent event. We hypothesize that the AIDS pandemic may have originated with a contaminated polio vaccine that was administered to inhabitants of Equatorial Africa from 1957 to 1959. The mechanism of evolution of HIV from this vaccine remains to be determined.

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