

# Soil-Transmitted Helminths: A Persistent Global Health Challenge.

Maria Oliveira\*

Department of Parasitology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

## Abstract

**Soil-transmitted helminths (STHs) remain a major public health concern, affecting over 1.5 billion people globally. These parasitic worms, including *Ascaris lumbricoides*, *Trichuris trichiura*, and hookworms, thrive in impoverished regions with poor sanitation. This rapid communication highlights recent advancements in STH research, including novel diagnostic tools, control strategies, and the role of deworming programs, while addressing emerging challenges such as anthelmintic resistance.**

## Introduction

STHs are among the most prevalent neglected tropical diseases, contributing to malnutrition, anemia, and impaired cognitive development, especially in children. The parasites are transmitted through contaminated soil, emphasizing the critical role of environmental factors in their epidemiology. Global control efforts, led by deworming programs and improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), have significantly reduced disease burden, but STHs continue to reemerge in endemic areas.

## Recent Advances in STH Research

### Innovations in Diagnostics

Traditional microscopy-based methods for STH detection are being replaced by more sensitive molecular techniques. Quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) has emerged as a reliable tool for detecting low-intensity infections, offering improved accuracy in assessing treatment efficacy and mapping disease prevalence.

### Impact of Mass Drug Administration (MDA)

MDA campaigns using benzimidazoles (e.g., albendazole, mebendazole) have successfully reduced STH prevalence in many regions. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of integrating MDA with WASH interventions to sustain long-term control. However, the lack of access to MDA in some low-resource settings remains a barrier to achieving elimination goals.

### Anthelmintic Resistance: A Growing Concern

Reports of reduced efficacy of benzimidazoles in livestock helminths have raised concerns about potential resistance in human STHs. Genome-wide studies are beginning to identify genetic markers associated with resistance, providing tools for early detection and monitoring.

### Advances in Vaccine Development

Vaccines against STHs are in experimental stages, with promising candidates targeting hookworms and *Ascaris*. These

vaccines aim to complement MDA by reducing reinfection rates and promoting herd immunity in endemic populations.

## Challenges and Future Directions

### Sustaining Control in High-Risk Areas

The reemergence of STH infections following MDA cessation underscores the need for integrated, community-driven approaches. Strengthening WASH infrastructure, combined with education campaigns, is critical for sustainable control.

### Climate Change and STH Transmission

Shifting climatic patterns may alter the distribution of STHs, potentially expanding endemic zones. Predictive modeling and adaptive strategies are essential for mitigating the impact of environmental changes on transmission dynamics.

### Equitable Access to Interventions

Addressing disparities in healthcare access is key to ensuring the success of STH control programs. Policies must prioritize resource allocation to underserved regions to achieve the World Health Organization's 2030 goals for STH elimination.

## Conclusion

The global fight against soil-transmitted helminths has made significant progress, yet challenges such as anthelmintic resistance and persistent reinfection threaten these gains. Continued investment in research, innovative control measures, and equitable healthcare delivery is imperative to eliminate STHs as a public health problem. Multisectoral collaboration will be essential to break the cycle of poverty and parasitic infection in affected communities.

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\*Correspondence to: Parasitology Research Unit, University of Lisbon, Portugal, E-mail: mariaoliveira.biology@gmail.com

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