

HIV trial child healthy nine years later

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A child born with HIV and given less than a year of treatment has remained healthy for nine years, raising new hopes for a cure.

Scientists at a conference in Paris yesterday presented the case of the South African boy — one of only three children in the world known to have gone into long-term remission.

The International Aids Society meeting was also told how a new vaccination, taken every two months, could replace a daily pill for those with HIV.

The boy joined a trial on the effects of early treatment when he was eight weeks old. The first group of patients, to which he belonged, was treated as early as possible for 40 weeks, another for 96 weeks, and a third was treated only when symptoms began to appear.

Doctors said that patients treated more quickly seemed to do better, but that the boy was a clear exception —

the average remission period was 30 weeks for the 40-week group and 70 weeks for the 96-week group.

Michael Brady, the medical director at Terrence Higgins Trust, said: “Early HIV therapy, in both children and adults, has been shown to reduce some of the damage to the immune system that HIV causes in the first few weeks and months of infection. If we can understand this mechanism better it will hopefully lead to novel treatment strategies and, maybe one day, a cure.”

In 2013 doctors reported that a girl in Mississippi appeared to be “functionally cured” 23 months after stopping treatment, although the virus later returned. In 2015 a French teenager who was treated throughout her first six years of life was revealed to have only trace levels of the virus, too small to measure, in her blood 12 years after stopping drugs.

Doctors stressed that the boy should not be described as cured. Advanced

techniques have detected a tiny reservoir of the virus within certain cells.

Mark Cotton, a paediatric Aids expert and author of the paper, said that the boy's body still had the virus “but it seems to be asleep”. He said that his immune system could be contributing to the results, and that they hoped to learn more about it.

A separate study found that an anti-retroviral therapy injected every four to eight weeks could suppress the HIV as effectively as a daily pill.

David Margolis, an author of that study, said: “Adherence to medication remains an important challenge in HIV treatment. Long-acting injectable anti-retroviral therapy could provide some patients with a more convenient approach to manage HIV infection that avoids daily oral dosing, and the need to keep, store, and transport medications as they go about their daily lives.”

The trial results are published in *The Lancet*.

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