

## “Bubble boy” breakthrough cure shows how some viruses can save lives

Beneath all the bad news about viruses this week lies a good virus: the one that underlies gene therapy for X-linked severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID-X1).

Altered viruses are the vehicles that transfer healthy human genes into the cells of people in whom the genes aren't working, providing a slew of new “forever fixes.” Nearly 100 gene transfer protocols are now in late-stage clinical trials.

The long-anticipated research report in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) sets gene therapy back on track, after a previous clinical trial treated the disease but triggered leukemia. The ongoing saga is also a terrific example of how scientific inquiry catalyzes medical progress.

SCID-X1 became widely known as “bubble boy disease” in 1976, when John Travolta played David Vetter in the film [“The Boy In The Plastic Bubble.”](#) It was a year after he rocketed to fame as sweatog Vinnie Barbarino on the TV program [“Welcome Back Kotter.”](#)

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