

Failed HIV vaccine study is ‘another frustrating defeat’ in the fight against AIDS

The failure-ridden search for a vaccine that can stop the [AIDS](#) virus has delivered yet another frustrating defeat. The HIV vaccine that had moved furthest along in human testing does not work, and the \$104 million trial in South Africa evaluating it has been stopped early. “There’s absolutely no evidence of efficacy,” says Glenda Gray, who heads the study.

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The efficacy study, which began in October 2016, is known as HVTN 702. It enrolled 5407 sexually active, HIV-uninfected men and women between 18 and 35 years of age at 14 sites across the country. Researchers randomly assigned half of the participants to receive a pair of HIV vaccines used in a one-two punch called a prime boost, whereas the other half received placebo shots. The trial was supposed to last until July 2022. But on 23 January, an independent monitoring board that takes scheduled, sneak peaks at the data to evaluate safety and efficacy, informed Gray and the other leaders of the study that it was “futile” to continue. There were 129 infections in the vaccinated group and 123 in those who received the placebo.

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NIAID Director Anthony Fauci says he has no regrets about backing the study. “I don’t think it was a bad choice. It was the only choice.”

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