

Self-spreading immunity? The potential dark side to preventing future pandemics with vaccines that spread like viruses

Imagine a future scenario in which a dangerous new virus is detected in chimpanzees. To prevent this virus from spreading to humans, biologists decide to deliberately infect scores of wild chimps with a transmissible vaccine—an infectious, lab-grown virus that immunizes, rather than harms, its host. The chimps, now vaccinated, no longer pose a threat to humans.

That solution sounds too good to be true, which is exactly the problem, as scientists warn in a new [Policy Forum](#) published [January 6] in Science. Self-spreading vaccines are potentially dangerous and difficult to manage, and are “genetically too unstable to be used safely and predictably outside contained facilities,” write the authors.

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This is not just their opinion, the authors argue. Rather, it’s an “evidence-based norm” that’s been around for decades, but this “norm now seems to be challenged,” they write. The result is an increased potential for “risky research on lab-modified self-spreading viruses,” according to the report. This could lead to a normalization of the concept and eventual real-world use without the proper safeguards.

[This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.](#)