

Guinea Worm

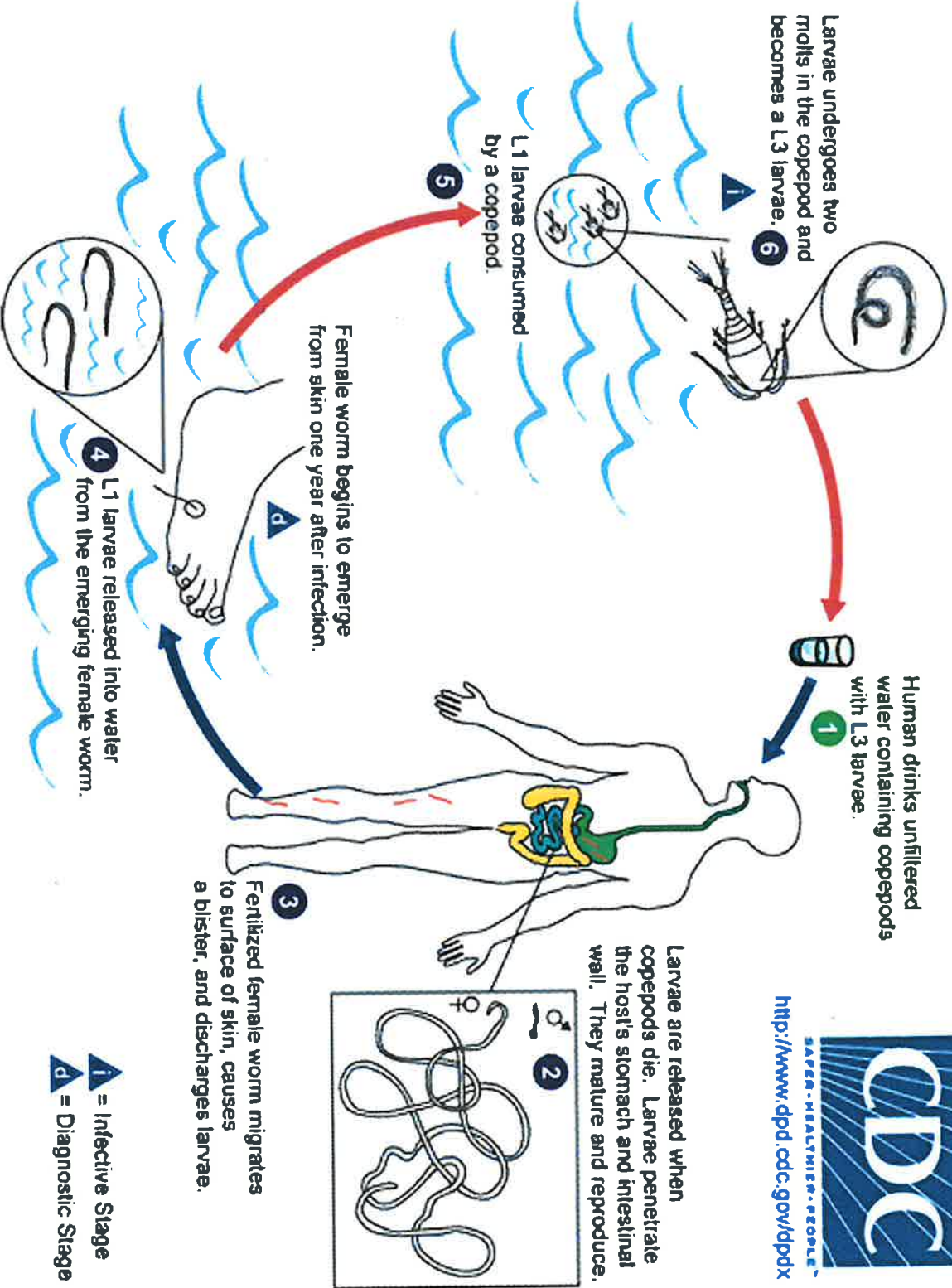
Dracunculiasis (more commonly known as guinea-worm disease) is a crippling parasitic disease caused by *Dracunculus medinensis*, a long thread-like worm. It is transmitted exclusively when people drink water contaminated with parasite-infected water fleas.

Dracunculiasis is rarely fatal but infected people become non-functional for months. It affects people in rural, deprived and isolated communities who depend mainly on open surface water sources such as ponds for drinking water.

About one year after the infection, a painful blister forms - 90% of the time on the lower leg – and one or more worms emerge accompanied by a burning sensation. To soothe the burning pain, patients often immerse the infected area in water. The worm(s) then releases thousands of larvae (baby worms) into the water. These larvae reach the infective stage after being ingested by tiny crustaceans or copepods, also called water fleas.

People swallow the infected water fleas when drinking contaminated water. The water fleas are killed in the stomach but the infective larvae are liberated. They then penetrate the wall of the intestine and migrate through the body. The fertilized female worm (which measures from 60–100 cm long) migrates under the skin tissues until it reaches the lower limbs, forming a blister or swelling from which it eventually emerges. The worm takes 10-14 months to emerge after infection.

There is no vaccine to prevent nor is there any medication to treat the disease. However prevention is possible and it is through preventive strategies that the disease is on the verge of eradication.



VIII

