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The public health control of scabies: priorities for research and action.

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Letter of correspondence:

We read the Article by David Engelman and colleagues with interest. Their overview of the key operational research questions provides a clear research agenda for the years to come.¹ Mass drug administration (MDA) using ivermectin reduced the prevalence of both scabies and impetigo tremendously in Fiji with a sustained effect even 24 months after the intervention.² Priority future studies are suggested to include non-island populations.

Outbreaks of scabies occur in refugee camps and centers worldwide. We want to emphasize the need for evidence supporting MDA to prevent and treat outbreaks among refugees. Scabies burden is high among refugees with an increased rate of complications, including secondary infections.³ Standard care based on topical permethrin of persons with scabies and their contacts is unlikely to contain outbreaks if based on passive case detection considering the limited access to health care amongst refugees. In high-income countries, ivermectin-based MDA could be integrated into screening programs and may contribute to the reciprocity of the overall program by immediately relieving suffering.⁴ Retrospective data provides limited evidence supporting ivermectin-based MDA by early detection and treatment, reducing the number of reinfestations and complications even after asylum seekers' transfer to other centers.⁵ Prospective data is needed to increase the level of evidence, determine the scabies prevalence justifying MDA and to decide upon the optimal MDA interval, which may depend on the number of newly arriving refugees. Moxidectin or slow-release ivermectin may provide added value in this setting to control scabies.

- 1 Engelman D, Cantey PT, Marks M, *et al.* The public health control of scabies: priorities for research and action. *Lancet* 2019; **394**: 81–92.
- 2 Romani L, Whitfeld MJ, Koroivueta J, *et al.* Mass Drug Administration for Scabies — 2 Years of Follow-up. *N Engl J Med* 2019; **381**: NEJMc1808439.
- 3 Meco E Di, Napoli A Di, Amato LM, *et al.* Infectious and dermatological diseases among arriving migrants on the Italian coasts. *Eur J Public Health* 2018; **28**: 910–6.
- 4 Beeres DT, Cornish D, Vonk M, *et al.* Screening for infectious diseases of asylum seekers upon arrival: The necessity of the moral principle of reciprocity. *BMC Med Ethics* 2018; **19**: 16.
- 5 Beeres DT, Ravensbergen SJ, Heidema A, *et al.* Efficacy of ivermectin mass-drug administration to control scabies in asylum seekers in the Netherlands: A retrospective cohort study between January 2014 – March 2016. *PLoS Negl Trop Dis* 2018; **12**: e0006401.

