

# SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN MAGAZINE

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## CONTRARY TO PAST THINKING, THE SIMIAN VERSION OF HIV CAN KILL CHIMPANZEES

By [Katherine Harmon](#) in [60-Second Science Blog](#)

Wild chimpanzees can become ill and die from a simian version of the AIDS virus, according to a paper to be published tomorrow in [Nature](#) (*Scientific American* is part of the Nature Publishing Group). The findings challenge long-held assumptions that chimps, our [close relatives](#), could carry a simian version of HIV but not get sick from it.

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) found its way into people from [a similar virus](#) carried by monkeys called SIV (simian immunodeficiency virus). Researchers studying chimpanzee populations in the Gombe National Park—where Jane Goodall worked—have found that some chimps infected with a certain strain of SIV were indeed contracting a simian version of AIDS. Autopsies of some of the dead chimps revealed similar organ degeneration similar to that found in long-term human AIDS patients.



“Our findings allow us to look at HIV from a new angle, comparing and contrasting chimpanzee and human infections,” lead study author Beatrice Hahn from the University of Alabama told [The New York Times](#).

Although the discovery might be bad news for declining chimpanzee populations, it does promise a better understanding for the disease in both humans and chimpanzees.

It “provides a missing link in the history of [the] HIV pandemic,” Daniel Douek of the National Institutes of Health told [The Chicago Tribune](#). “If we identify the evolutionary adaptations, that opens up therapeutic avenues for HIV disease.”

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