

Body louse genome sequencing begins

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Purdue University's Barry Pittendrigh and the University of Massachusetts' John Clark have been named to begin sequencing the complete body louse genome.

Body lice reportedly carry some of the most infamous and deadly diseases that have plagued people for centuries. Pittendrigh, an insect geneticist, and Clark, an environmental toxicologist, say they hope work will lead to pest control methods that prevent the spread of diseases, such as relapsing fever, trench fever and typhus.

"If we have a relatively complete louse genome, we can do experiments necessary to discover how lice can digest human blood and transmit disease," said Pittendrigh, a Purdue associate professor of entomology. "The more we learn about the biochemical workings of these tiny creatures, the greater our chance of impacting issues associated with human health."

The louse genome sequencing continues the national genome institute's emphasis on using comparative genomic sequencing analysis to understand the structure and function of the human genome and the biological processes involved in human diseases.

The body louse genome is one of seven non-mammalian organisms chosen this year for the program and one of three targeted for a high-quality sequence.

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