

Scientists lift malaria's invisible cloak

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Australian scientists have found a way to break through the invisibility cloak of the world's deadliest malaria parasite.

The parasite, formally plasmodium falciparum, sneaks past the human immune system with the help of a wardrobe of invisibility cloaks, Science Daily says.

International research scholars at Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Australia have determined how P. falciparum can turn on one cloaking gene and keep dozens of others silent until each is needed in turn.

Their findings, published in the journal Nature, reveal the mechanism of action thought to be the key to the parasite's survival.

A DNA sequence near the start of a cloaking gene, known as the gene's promoter, not only turns up production of its protein, but also keeps all other cloaking genes under wraps, the researchers say.

"The promoter is all you need for activation and silencing," says scholar Alan Cowman.

Malaria kills an estimated 2.7 million people annually, 75 percent of them children in Africa

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