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Providing valuable lessons for today's pandemic, Foege and Zhdanov honored for eradication of a much deadlier virus

Imagine how you'd react to the headline *"Mutated coronavirus discovered, killing 30% of those infected."* Smallpox was such a lethal virus, estimated to have killed 500 million people in its last century. Today, the 41st anniversary of its eradication is celebrated by honoring two of the heroes who made it happen: Dr. William Foege and Dr. Viktor Zhdanov will share the \$100,000 Future of Life Award in an online ceremony including Bill Gates, Dr. Anthony Fauci and freshly minted Nobel Laureate Dr. Jennifer Doudna.

The lessons learned from defeating smallpox are highly relevant to the covid pandemic: *"We're all indebted to Bill Foege and Viktor Zhdanov for their critical contributions to the eradication of smallpox, which demonstrated the immense value of science and international collaboration for fighting disease"*, said António Guterres, Secretary General, United Nations. *"Bill Foege's advocacy of surveillance and containment (applying water to the house on fire rather than the whole neighborhood) was very significant for the overall success"*, said Harvard professor George Church. *"Bill played a pivotal role in eradicating smallpox and deserves the Future of Life Award. I look forward to seeing what the next generation of public health students will accomplish—by following in this giant's footsteps"*, said Bill Gates.

Viktor Zhdanov has been called *"the best person who ever lived"* by Oxford professor Will MacAskill, for successfully persuading the World Health Organization to initiate an eradication campaign where the USA and the Soviet Union collaborated despite the Cold War. Dr. MacAskill added: *"Smallpox was one of the worst diseases to ever befall the human race, and its eradication is one of the greatest achievements of humanity. Bill Foege and Viktor Zhdanov should be celebrated for their contributions, and should inspire us today to take effective action to tackle the world's most pressing problems."*

UNICEF estimates that smallpox eradication has saved close to 200 million lives – so far. *"In selecting Bill Foege and Viktor Zhdanov as recipients of its prestigious 2020 award, the Future of Life Institute reminds us that seemingly impossible problems can be solved when science is respected, international collaboration is fostered, and goals are boldly defined. As we celebrate this achievement quarantined in our homes and masked outdoors, what message could be more obvious or more audacious?"*, said Dr. Rachel Bronson, President & CEO of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. George Church gives examples of such seemingly impossible problems: *"Smallpox eradication is a model for elimination of other human-specific diseases in the future, such as polio, measles, mumps, rubella and syphilis."*



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While serving as the Soviet Union's Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Viktor Zhdanov persuasively argued at the Eleventh World Health Assembly meeting in 1958 that the world could eradicate smallpox within a decade with a united effort, and successfully lobbied the Soviet Union to donate 25 million doses of the smallpox vaccine to kickstart the effort in developing countries. The WHO accepted his proposal in 1959 under Resolution WHA11.54. Viktor Zhdanov passed away in 1987, and his award will be received by his sons Viktor and Michael in his memory.

While working for the Centers for Disease Control in Africa as Chief of the Smallpox Eradication Program, Dr. Bill Foege developed the highly successful surveillance and "ring vaccination" strategy to contain smallpox spread. This greatly reduced the number of vaccinations needed, ensuring that the limited resources available sufficed to make smallpox the first infectious disease to be eradicated in human history.

The award: The Future of Life Award honors those who take exceptional measures to safeguard the collective future of humanity. The 2017 award honored Vasili Arkhipov for single-handedly preventing a Soviet nuclear attack against the US in 1962, and the 2018 award celebrated Stanislav Petrov for helping avert an accidental nuclear war in 1983. The 2019 award honored Dr. Matthew Meselson for his remarkable contributions to getting biological weapons banned and focusing biology on curing rather than killing. The award is funded by Skype-cofounder Jaan Tallinn and presented by the Future of Life Institute (FLI), a non-profit organization advocating positive technology use. "By eradicating smallpox and banning bioweapons, biology is a role model for other sciences struggling to help and not harm", said FLI president Max Tegmark. This dual nature of science was echoed by MIT biology Professor Jonathan King: *"The victory over smallpox highlights both the power of science to help humanity, and also how science could do more good if we didn't divert vast resources to developing new weapons of mass destruction. We need the world's scientific community to draw inspiration from Foege and Zhdanov and press our political leaders to fund healthcare, not warfare."*

FLI's Dr. Emilia Javorsky, a biotech entrepreneur, added: *"As we embark on our journey to eradicate COVID in an environment plagued by mistrust and misinformation, Foege and Zhdanov have shown us that the seemingly impossible is possible. Their example illustrates the importance of rebuilding and restoring trust in science, between nations, and perhaps most powerfully, between each other."*

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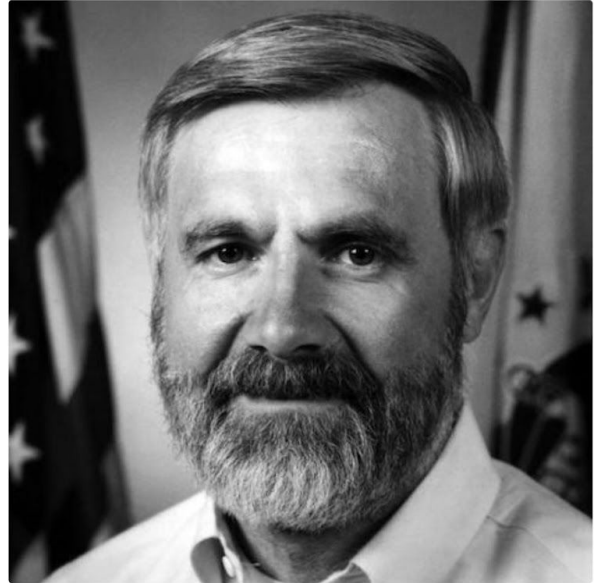


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Images: The photos below have been cleared for media use; please contact anna@futureoflife.org for high-resolution versions and additional images.



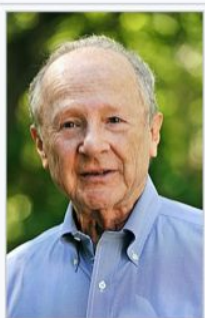


Viktor Zhdanov



William Foegel

Past winners of the [Future of Life Award](#):

Year	Recipient	Citation	Category	Country	Ceremony
2017	 Vasili Arkhipov	for heroically helping avert a potentially cataclysmic nuclear war on October 27 1962 by preventing a nuclear torpedo attack on the U.S. Navy	Nuclear Weapons	Russia	London
2018	 Stanislav Petrov	for heroically ensuring that a false alarm did not escalate into a cataclysmic nuclear war on September 26 1983	Nuclear Weapons	Russia	New York
2019	 Matthew Meselson	for his unparalleled contributions to the Biological Weapons Convention, ensuring that the ever more powerful science of biology helps rather than harms humankind	Biological Weapons	USA	Boulder