

NEWS

## Learn about superbugs and a one woman's journey in Yale panel



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— Mallory Smith and her mother, Diane Shader Smith, in Will Battersby's "Salt in My Soul."  
Giant Pictures / Contributed photo

NEW HAVEN — Superbugs, bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics, are growing more prevalent but little is known about them and the viruses, called phages, that are a growing weapon against them.

Yale will launch its Center for Phage Biology and Therapy, focusing the ongoing efforts to develop disease-fighting phages, on Thursday with a panel discussing phage therapy and a new documentary about a 25-year-old woman who died of cystic fibrosis before phages potentially could have saved her.

“Salt in My Soul,” based on Mallory Smith’s posthumously published memoir, has been released in theaters in New York and Los Angeles and is available to stream. Smith’s mother, Diane Shader Smith, has become an advocate for phage therapy and will be on the panel Thursday, as will the film’s director, Will Battersby, and a woman who connected Diane Shader Smith to the researchers at Yale, Ella Balasa.

The panel also will feature Paul Turner, director of Yale’s center, and other members of the center, including Ben Chan. The panel will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday on Zoom, <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85030991639>.

Mallory Smith was the first person to receive phage therapy for cystic fibrosis, according to her mother. Her memoir helped her mother connect to Turner and his lab.

“I was on a nationwide book tour in person,” Shader Smith said. “And at the end of the talk, after talking about phage therapy, a young woman came up and introduced herself to me and she said, ‘my name is Ella Balasa.’ ... And she said, ‘after Mallory passed away, I got phage therapy. And it was successful.’” Balasa had received her therapy at Yale.

The film is “very dramatic,” Shader Smith said. “You see the footage of the phages being flown in on the helicopter. ... You see them being carried down the hall. You see Dr. Palewski at UPMC administering them and the first dose is administered intravenously.” Dr. Joseph Palewski is at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

While phages weren’t able to save Mallory’s life, “They did see on the autopsy, that the phages were starting to work,” Shader Smith said.

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