

In the news

HOPEFUL BEGINNINGS

The possibility of a protective vaccine against malaria has been given a boost by two studies showing that an experimental malaria vaccine provides protection to infants (*New England Journal of Medicine*, 8 Dec 2008).

Administration of the vaccine, known as RTS,S, with the adjuvant AS02D reduced the number of cases of malaria in infants under 1 year of age in Tanzania by up to 65%. The malaria vaccine, which was given at the same time as the combined DTP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) and Hib (*Haemophilus influenzae* type b) vaccine, had no obvious safety concerns and did not interfere with immune responses to the combined vaccine.

In a separate trial in Tanzania and Kenya, vaccination of 5- to 17-month-old infants with RTS,S and AS02E decreased the number of malaria cases that required hospitalization by 53%.

In the accompanying editorial, William Collins and John Barnwell of the US Centers for Disease and Prevention said, "This is the first candidate malaria vaccine to show significant protection in laboratory- and field-based clinical studies." (*New England Journal of Medicine*, 8 Dec 2008.)

The vaccine has been developed by GlaxoSmithKline and the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI), which is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Christian Loucq, Director of MVI, said, "The study results strongly show that our investments in developing malaria vaccines are beginning to pay dividends." (*The Independent*, 9 Dec 2008.) The MVI received a grant from the Foundation of \$107.6 million to develop the vaccine and GlaxoSmithKline says it invested \$300 million (*The Wall Street Journal*, 9 Dec 2008).

"We are one important step closer to the date when malaria will join diseases like smallpox and polio, which have been either eliminated or controlled through vaccines," said Loucq (*The Telegraph*, 8 Dec 2008).

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