

The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF announced today that they have received grants totalling US\$ 10 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop and introduce a powerful new polio vaccine – a critical part of the strategy to end poliovirus transmission worldwide by the end of 2005.

The new vaccine, monovalent oral polio vaccine type-1 (mOPV1), will be more efficient at boosting immunity against poliovirus strain "type 1" than today's trivalent vaccine, which works against all three polio strains. Epidemiologists believe the new vaccine could help to bring a swift end to polio through mass immunization campaigns across areas where virus types 2 and 3 have already been eliminated.

The Gates Foundation funds will help WHO and UNICEF together with a qualified vaccine manufacturer to develop, licence and introduce mOPV1 by May 2005. The vaccine will be used initially in Egypt, which has successfully eliminated poliovirus types 2 and 3, and could soon be made available to other areas where only type-1 poliovirus remains.

The mOPV1 will be produced and licensed under the oversight of the drugs regulatory agencies of France and Egypt. The Egyptian government will train health workers in the use of the vaccine and conduct post-marketing surveillance. WHO will be responsible for overall coordination of the project, with UNICEF procuring and delivering the vaccine to the government of Egypt. Of the total grant amount, US\$ 3 937 500 will be disbursed by the WHO and US\$ 6 152 500 by UNICEF.

The Gates Foundation has been a strong supporter of polio eradication, previously providing US\$ 75 million in funding. "The Gates Foundation grant plays a catalytic role in mOPV1 development," said M. A. Tag-El-Din, Egyptian Minister of Health and Population, "This will help support the national efforts to get rid of the virus once and for all."

Polio once crippled 350 000 children a year globally. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a 16-year, US\$ 3 billion project, has reduced the number of cases by over 99% to just over a thousand children in 2004. Polio will be the first disease to be eradicated in the 21st century and only the second disease ever wiped out by humankind, after smallpox.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is spearheaded by the World Health Organization, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF. The polio eradication coalition includes governments of countries affected by polio; private sector foundations (e.g. United Nations Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation); development banks (e.g. the World Bank); donor governments (e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America); the European Commission; humanitarian and nongovernmental organizations (e.g. the International Red Cross and Red Crescent societies) and corporate partners (e.g. Sanofi Pasteur, De Beers, Wyeth). Volunteers in developing countries also play a key role; 20 million have participated in mass immunization campaigns.

Friday 26th of April 2024 04:55:25 AM