



News digest 37
Q3 2013

Dear partners, friends, and colleagues:

The following is a summary of recent, current, and upcoming activities at the Meningitis Vaccine Project (MVP). We welcome your comments and suggestions at info@meningvax.org and encourage you to forward this update to friends or colleagues who might be interested in learning about MVP's progress.

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Vaccine introduction and communication activities

- MenAfriVac® rollout had an early start this year with the vaccination of more than 6.3 million people in Sudan between September 13–23, bringing the total number of vaccinees in the African meningitis belt to close to 110 million since the vaccine was first introduced in Africa in 2010. Results are still coming in from remote areas, and final vaccine coverage data will be available within the next few weeks. Developed through MVP, MenAfriVac is manufactured at Serum Institute of India Ltd. (SIIL).
- Preparations at the global, national, regional, and local levels continue to advance for the introduction of MenAfriVac in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and The Gambia, where vaccination campaigns are tentatively scheduled for October 17–26, November 2–11, and November 28–December 4, respectively.
- From September 4–19, the World Health Organization (WHO) and partners provided technical assistance to Ethiopian health authorities to accelerate the preparations for vaccine introduction in the country. In late July WHO also assisted Ethiopia and The Gambia in the development of their communication and media plans.
- On September 12, *The Lancet* published a key [study](#) on the evaluation of the effectiveness of MenAfriVac introduction in Chad. Undertaken by African and European scientists and led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTP) and Centre de Support en Santé Internationale (CSSI) in Chad, the research showed that MenAfriVac had a dramatic effect on cases of group A meningitis and carriage of the disease-causing bacteria in the throat: approximately 1.8 million people aged 1–29 years received a single dose of MenAfriVac in three regions of Chad in December 2011. The incidence of meningitis of any kind in these regions during the 2012 meningitis season was 2.5 per 100,000 people, compared to an incidence of 43.6 per 100,000 in regions where mass vaccination had not been undertaken—a difference of 94%. In addition, no cases of group A meningococcal meningitis were detected in individuals resident in the vaccinated areas who were younger than one year of age or older than 29 years of age, which suggests that the vaccine has a robust herd immunity effect.
- Communication activities surrounding the publication of the Chad data included a [press release](#); media outreach; and a LSHTP [podcast](#) where Prof. Sir Brian Greenwood describes meningitis epidemics in Africa, the birth of the MVP and the collaboration with SIIL, the Chad study and its implication, and what the future holds. Picked up by Agence France Presse and international news channels, the story appeared in several print and online media in Europe and Africa. MVP director Dr. Marie-Pierre Préziosi gave interviews to the *Financial Times* and Deutsche Welle (French podcast available [here](#)), while LSHTP's Prof. James Stuart spoke to IRIN, the UN news service. Entitled "meningitis vaccine a 'stunning' success," the IRIN article is available in [English](#) and [Arabic](#).
- While *The Lancet* study covers the impact of MenAfriVac introduction in a single country, the results support an earlier WHO [report](#) indicating that the number of meningitis cases throughout the entire African meningitis belt during the 2012–2013 season was at the lowest level in a decade.

Surveillance and epidemic preparedness activities

- MVP and WHO staff attended the International Coordinating Group (ICG) on Vaccine Provision for Epidemic Meningitis Control meeting in Geneva on July 14–15. Meeting participants reviewed African countries' response to meningitis epidemics this year, including the management of emergency stocks of vaccine, and they forecasted vaccine stockpile to be constituted prior to the 2013–2014 epidemic season.
- Representatives from the WHO Intercountry Support Team (IST) team in Burkina Faso met delegates from Niger and Benin at a cross-border meeting in Natitingou, Benin, on August 14–16. Meeting participants reviewed epidemiologic data following the introduction of MenAfriVac in the three countries and planned cross-border collaboration activities related to disease surveillance and response.
- WHO IST conducted two workshops in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, from September 2–15. The workshops aimed at increasing capacity building in the collection, conservation, and transportation of biologic substances; and providing training on standard operating procedures for enhanced surveillance of meningitis, data management, and laboratory confirmation work.
- On September 17, WHO HQ and WHO IST jointly organized a laboratory expert meeting in Geneva with the objective of revising the laboratory algorithms for the diagnosis of meningitis. The development of these simplified algorithms is meant to provide clear guidance to the countries on the hierarchy of laboratory tests to be performed at each level of their health system (peripheral, intermediary, and national) in order to identify the meningitis-causing pathogens. In the end the overarching goal is to promote standardized laboratory practices and to enhance the information for decision making.

Clinical activities

- The following seven clinical trials related to licensing and prequalification of MenAfriVac for use in 1- to 29-year olds and/or infants have been successfully completed:
 - Phase 1 [PsA-TT-001](#) study in India.
 - Phase 2 [PsA-TT-002](#) study in Mali and the Gambia.
 - Phase 2/3 [PsA-TT-003](#) study in Mali, Senegal, and the Gambia.
 - Phase 2/3 [PsA-TT-003a](#) study in India.
 - Phase 2 [PsA-TT-004](#) study in Ghana.
 - Phase 3 [PsA-TT-005](#) study in India.
 - Phase 3 [PsA-TT-006](#) study in Mali.
- The last administration of MenAfriVac as an investigational product took place on July 31 at Center for Vaccine Development-Mali (CVD-Mali) where the last of the 1,500 subjects participating in the [PsA-TT-007](#) clinical study received the test vaccine. The vaccine has been given to more than 8,000 individuals in 8 clinical trial sites in 5 countries since the start of PsA-TT-001 in India in August 2005. Launched on March 6, 2012 (just two weeks before the political coup), [PsA-TT-007](#) evaluates the immunogenicity and safety of different schedules and formulations of the meningococcal A conjugate vaccine administered concomitantly with local EPI vaccines in 1,500 healthy infants and toddlers. MVP and partners want to acknowledge the extraordinary commitment of CVD-Mali staff who managed to complete the study in time despite the political unrest that characterized Mali during the course of the study.
- A regulatory meeting took place September 12–13 at the PATH office in Ferney-Voltaire, France, to review progress on the application dossier for a licensure variation of MenAfriVac (pediatric indication) and brainstorm on the way forward. Participants included MVP staff, representatives from SIIL, and MVP technical advisors for regulatory affairs.

That's all for now from the MVP team. Stay tuned for our next news digest in three months' time.

We look forward to receiving your comments at info@meningvax.org.

Created in 2001, the Meningitis Vaccine Project is a partnership between WHO and PATH. The mission of MVP is to eliminate epidemic meningitis as a public health problem in sub-Saharan Africa through the development, testing, introduction, and widespread use of conjugate meningococcal vaccines.

For more information on MVP, please visit our website at <http://www.meningvax.org>.