



News digest 4
Q4, 2004

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 Development Activities

- Serologic testing of the meningococcal A candidate vaccine (Men A conjugate) that was produced at Serum Institute of India Limited in Pune was completed in December, and results showed that the conjugate vaccine induced a high level of antibodies in laboratory animals.
- Toxicology and local tolerance testing of the candidate vaccine was completed in December, and the vaccine had no deleterious effects in animals.
- MVP signed a letter of intent with the United Kingdom Health Protection Agency to perform serologic assays used to measure immune responses induced by the Men A conjugate vaccine.

Clinical Activities

- All Phase I study documents have been finalized, including the protocol, the subject information sheet, and the certificate of informed consent.
- Phase I materials have been submitted to appropriate ethical bodies for review and approval.
- The Phase II study synopsis was updated based on recommendations made at the MVP Expert Panel Clinical Subgroup meeting in Washington, DC, in September 2004.

Surveillance Activities

- The World Health Organization's (WHO's) Multi-Disease Surveillance and Control (MDSC) team in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, continued to serve as a principal site for enhanced meningitis surveillance. Surveillance data were compiled, analyzed, and summarized using disease trend graphs and epidemiological maps, and a weekly feedback bulletin was prepared for countries, partners, and a global audience.
- The MDSC team is currently preparing the summary surveillance report for the year 2004.
- WHO's standard operating procedures (SOPs) for enhanced meningitis surveillance were finalized in January 2005 and distributed to meningitis belt countries. While many of these countries have national plans for integrated disease surveillance, there is a need for the surveillance systems to be strengthened in order to detect changing epidemiological patterns of meningitis epidemics in a timely manner and provide evidence to guide case management and epidemic response. The SOPs serve three specific goals: (1) to systematically collect and analyze epidemiological and laboratory data on suspected cases, (2) to conduct rapid laboratory

confirmation of causal pathogens, and (3) to use this information for immediate public health control measures, as well as to monitor the situation throughout the year.

Epidemiological Research

- On October 15, the WHO Public Health Mapping Programme/Geographic Information Systems team presented their health mapping work to the MVP team. The utility of the techniques was apparent to all, and a new collaboration was begun.

Communication and Vaccine Introduction Strategy

- The third meeting of the WHO MVP Project Advisory Group (PAG), a group of African public health officials from meningitis belt countries that advises MVP, was held on December 6 in Bamako, Mali. The main objectives of the meeting were (1) to advise on the clinical plan for the qualification of the Men A conjugate and (2) to advise on the vaccine introduction plan.
- Dr. F. Marc LaForce was asked to summarize MVP progress at a December 1 briefing at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation entitled “Planning for Success.”
- In addition, MVP participated in or made presentations at the following meetings:
 - World Vaccine Congress, Lyon, France, October 11–13.
 - US Agency for International Development/Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival, Washington, DC, October 25.
- The MVP web site was redesigned in October 2004 with the help of PATH graphics and information services teams. Check out our new look at <http://www.meningvax.org>.
- The WHO Immunization, Vaccines, and Biologicals unit has updated the MVP page on its web site (see <http://www.who.int/vaccines/en/olddocs/meningACproject.shtml>). In addition, an article entitled “Meeting the public health challenge of epidemic meningitis in Africa” on the Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response web site highlights how the conjugate vaccine developed by MVP and its partners could offer a brighter future for people in sub-Saharan Africa (see http://www.who.int/csr/disease/meningococcal/challenge2004_11_10/en/).
- The communication plan for Phase I clinical trials in India was developed and shared with MVP’s principal collaborators.
- The MVP team enhanced their knowledge about social mobilization and advocacy during the annual MVP retreat on November 3–4 in Geneva. Most of the retreat sessions were dedicated to topics and training on social mobilization and advocacy in Africa and were led by Rodrigue Barry from WHO Health Information Promotion from Ouagadougou. The interactive sessions facilitated by Richard Wilkinson from PATH headquarters resulted in strong initial planning for advocacy work in Africa to support clinical study implementation and vaccine introduction.
- An article entitled “Evaluation of Serogroup A Meningococcal Vaccines in Africa: A Demonstration Project” coauthored by Drs. Soriano-Gabarró and Rosenstein of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and by Dr. LaForce of MVP was published in the *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*. The article appears in the special issue “Research Agenda for Introducing New Vaccines in Developing Countries: Translational Research” of September 2004.

That's all for now from the MVP team. Stay tuned for our next news digest (due April 2005). We look forward to receiving your comments at info@meningvax.org.

Created in 2001, MVP 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>.