

The William H. Gates Foundation Announces a \$50 Million Gift to Establish the Malaria Vaccine Initiative

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PATH (Program for Appropriate Technology in Health), a Seattle-based nonprofit, announced today that Bill and Melinda Gates, through the William H. Gates Foundation, have made an award of \$50 million to support a Malaria Vaccine Initiative. The Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI) will accelerate the development of a vaccine for malaria, the most prevalent of all tropical diseases. The goal of the initiative is to identify promising candidates for a malaria vaccine and support the development process of these vaccines.

The Malaria Vaccine Initiative will work with national and international agencies and organizations to identify gaps and apply resources to specific efforts. Funds may be directed toward the support of laboratories, the coordination and management of pilot production and release of products for clinical trials, as well as the design and execution of clinical trials in malaria-endemic regions. MVI will be guided by an expert Technical Advisory Group, which will assist MVI in making decisions about which vaccine candidates to focus on, and how best to support these efforts.

"Malaria is exacting an enormous toll on the health and economic development of hundreds of millions of families, most of who live in developing countries," said Gordon W. Perkin, M.D., President of PATH. "Although drugs that treat the illness have been around for some time, the malaria parasite continues to develop resistance to these drugs. The world badly needs a vaccine."

It is estimated that a third of the world's population, about 2.3 billion people, are at risk of infection and that about 300-500 million people are infected each year. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 2 million individuals die from malaria each year, most of them children. This means a child dies of malaria every twenty seconds. Survivors are often weakened or disabled; the costs of malaria in lost productivity may reach as high as 20 percent of the GDP in some developing countries. Despite this enormous burden of morbidity and mortality, malaria research in general, and studies on malaria vaccines in particular, have been drastically under-funded.

One of the challenges facing development of an effective malaria vaccine is the genetic complexity of the parasite. The malaria parasite has an amazing capacity to outwit the immune system of its victims. Scientists are nonetheless optimistic that a malaria vaccine is feasible, based on promising clinical tests. It is clear however, that major resources and a concerted effort from multiple organizations will be required to achieve a vaccine that can be widely distributed.

"Because of the scope of the problem, and both the increase in parasite resistance to available drugs and the limited success of various vector control strategies, a vaccine is crucial to the effort to combat this terrible disease," said Dr. Perkin. "MVI will work to encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors to see that a malaria vaccine is indeed developed."

MVI will be administered through PATH, an international, nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve health, especially the health of women and children. PATH works in partnership with host-country governments and local agencies to assess health problems and identify and implement creative and effective solutions.

The Malaria Vaccine Initiative follows an earlier grant to PATH by Bill and Melinda Gates to support the Children's Vaccine Program, and will benefit from the same group of international health experts assembled to provide guidance to that program. "Bill and Melinda are extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity to achieve major gains in global health through carefully coordinated strategies such as these," said Bill Gates, Sr., head of the William H. Gates Foundation. "To support further giving in global health and learning, Bill and Melinda have recently increased the assets of the Foundation by \$5 billion," added Gates, Sr. Recent gifts include a \$50 million grant to Columbia University for a program to reduce maternal mortality in developing countries, a \$25 million grant to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative to speed development of an effective prevention for AIDS, and a \$5 million grant to the International Consortium for Blood Safety to improve the safety of blood transfusion worldwide, and eliminate the disparity between the high level of blood safety in the United States and Europe in comparison to the level of safety in the developing world.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations comprise the William H. Gates Foundation, now with assets of \$10 billion, and the Gates Learning Foundation, with assets of \$1.3 billion.

Information about the Malaria Vaccine Initiative can be found at www.MalariaVaccine.org, and comments can be emailed to info@MalariaVaccine.org.