

Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project launched in Kenya

UNICEF and The Philips Foundation, together with Concern Worldwide, and Maker and Gearbox, have launched the Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project, to help save lives and improve the health of pregnant women and children in Kenya.

Under the leadership of the Government of Kenya and the Project's Steering Committee at the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and The Philips Foundation will facilitate the development of innovative health technology and solutions in the field of maternal, newborn and child health.

This investment is in keeping with the Government of Kenya's commitment to investing in innovative, home-grown solutions.

Kenya has reduced under-five child deaths per 1000 lives from 90 in 2003 to 52 in 2014, but this still falls below the Millennium Development Goal 4 target of 33 by the end of 2015. Neonatal mortality is also very high at 22 deaths per 1000 live births.

By 2018, UNICEF and The Philips Foundation, together with partner organisations and local innovation hubs, and with guidance from the Government of Kenya, aim to develop and scale-up in-

novative, low-cost and locally designed healthcare devices.

'For 1 million babies worldwide every year, their day of birth is also their day of death,' said Sharad Sapra, UNICEF Director of the UNICEF Global Innovation Centre. 'But with strengthened health systems and innovative solutions for both mothers and children, the chance for survival is greatly increased.'

The Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project is financed by The Philips Foundation and uses the local expertise of Philips Research Africa in Nairobi to mentor social entrepreneurs and facilitate the transfer of healthcare technology know-how in Kenya.

'At The Philips Foundation, it is our belief that programmes that combine innovation, partnerships and empowering people will make a lasting and meaningful difference in communities,' said Katy Hartley, Head of The Philips Foundation. 'In the case of the Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project, we are doing just that, as Royal Philips can offer expertise and support from its Philips Research Africa, together with UNICEF and our implementation partners, to enable social entrepreneurs to improve health outcomes for their own communities.'

Rift Valley Fever kills four in Mauritania

The Rift Valley Fever (FVR) has claimed four lives in Mauritania, the Mauritanian Health Minister, Ould Ahmedou Ould Hademine Jelvoune said.

According to the minister, who was speaking to TV channel Al-Mouritaniye, the first case was diagnosed on 14th September 2015.

A second case occurred on 24th September followed by several others on 2nd October.

Jelvoune explained that it is not the same fever that has been widely diagnosed in recent months among Nouakchott residents.

People with FVR are usually treated before reaching the haemorrhagic stage



and the death rate among them is between 1%-3%, he added.

In most cases, humans are infected with FVR after direct or indirect contact with the blood or organs of infected animals.

The virus can be transmitted when handling infected animal tissues or during foetus or carcass disposal, according to the World Health Organization.

Salmonella unmasked as major killer of young children in Africa



Invasive Salmonella infections in sub-Saharan Africa are a major cause of child illness and deaths, a new body of research into this usually overlooked infectious disease has revealed.

In the West, Salmonella is commonly thought of as a bacterium responsible for relatively benign cases of food poisoning. However, a supplement to the leading infectious diseases journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* now exposes the unacceptable toll of sickness and death caused by invasive Salmonella infections in sub-Saharan Africa.

The supplement, sponsored by New Zealand's University of Otago and supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a key output of a project to better understand the disease burden of this major cause of child death in sub-Saharan Africa.

Guest edited by Professor John Crump, Co-Director of the University's Centre for International Health, and by Professor Robert Heyderman, Professor of Infectious Diseases and International Health, at University College London, the supplement emerged from a consensus meeting of experts held in Malawi last year, supported by the Wellcome Trust and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The supplement includes 19 scientific papers that describe the toll of invasive Salmonella infections in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, and Tanzania.

It also includes papers on the application of genetic fingerprinting and mathematical modelling to understand disease sources and modes of transmission, as well as vaccines and other prevention measures.

Experts want medical dosage in local dialects



Kenya and other African countries should adopt cultural approaches to combating diseases, health experts have said.

Speaking at the Fifth Africa Governance, Leadership and Management Convention in Kwale County, the experts called for the translation of medical prescription and medicine dosage to native language to allow rural residents to understand them.

'For community-based health systems to be a success, the private sector and government should come together and translate medical information so that even the prescription is written in native languages,' said Dr. Nicholas Letting, the Vice Chancellor of Management University of Africa.

Martine Kappel, the founder of True North Leadership, a governance consultancy, said the government should facilitate traditional medication. 'Not all African tradition healers are bad. There are African medicines that assist in the fight against some diseases that should be encouraged,' said Kappel.

The experts said Kenya and most other African countries have not adopted a community-based health services approach to combat outbreaks of infectious diseases and other epidemics like cholera and Ebola.

For Africa to succeed in the fight against common diseases, the Chancellor of Moi University, Prof Mariam Were said, it should roll-out community-based health approach.

'Kenya is still at a very high-risk if an infectious disease breaks out. The government started to implement the community-based health approach in 2008, but it did that to only those areas that had cholera outbreak,' she said.

Ethiopia and Ghana were cited as the countries that have successfully implemented community health approach. 'Ghana successfully dealt with the Ebola threat because its health system is perfect. It was able to deal with it because of the vibrant community-based health system,' said Were.

Scientists mark 'stunning success' of vaccine in virtually ridding Africa of meningitis A

Five years after the introduction of an affordable conjugate meningitis A vaccine, immunisation has led to the control and near elimination of the deadly disease in the African 'meningitis belt'.

The findings are part of a special collection of 29 articles in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, with guest editors from Public Health England and the former Meningitis Vaccine Project, a partnership between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the international health non-profit PATH, about the steps taken for the development, introduction, and evaluation of the PSAT conjugate meningitis A vaccine for Africa, better known as MenAfriVac®.

But scientists are now warning that unless countries within the belt incorporate the meningitis A vaccine in routine immunisation schedules for infants, there is a risk that the disease could rebound in 15 years' time.

'We have nearly eliminated meningitis A epidemics from Africa, but the fact is the job is not yet done,' said Dr. Jean-

Marie Okwo-Bele, Director of Immunisation, Vaccines and Biologicals at WHO.

The vaccine was developed in response to a plea for help from ministers of health in sub-Saharan Africa after an outbreak of meningitis A in 1996 that infected over 250 000 people and killed over 25 000 in just a few months. The vaccine costs less than US\$0.50 a dose.

When scientists followed up with 900 people aged 2 through to 29 years from Senegal, Mali, and The Gambia who were vaccinated with MenAfriVac®, they found that 90% of individuals still had protective antibodies in their system five years later. Study authors said this is a good predictor of even longer-term protection that they will continue to track.

'We need to ensure that we finish the job with meningitis A and apply the lessons learned to the next generation of meningitis vaccines for Africa,' said Dr. Marc LaForce, who formerly led development of the meningitis A vaccine for PATH and is now with Serum Institute of India.

Facebook developing satellite internet for Africa

Facebook and French satellite operator Eutelsat wants to launch an internet-satellite that could boost internet connectivity in more than 14 African countries.

Easier and more reliable access to the internet could offer substantial benefits to social, educational and healthcare ideals of the National Development Plan.

The Facebook-financed satellite, named Amos-6, would be able to offer faster and more reliable internet access to isolated areas in Africa.

'Facebook has been exploring ways to use aircraft and satellites to beam internet access down into communities from the sky,' Mark Zuckerberg wrote. 'To connect people living in remote regions, traditional connectivity infrastructure is often difficult and inefficient, so we need to invent new technologies.'

The satellite project is part of Facebook's Internet.org non-profit initiative

that aims to bring free and reliable internet access to the two-thirds of the world that have been unable to receive it.

Sub-Saharan Africa's current level of broadband connectivity is the lowest in the world, according to the United Nations' 2014 State of Broadband report. It reaches less than 2% of the populations in countries such as Guinea, Somalia, Burundi, and Eritrea. The internet remains a novelty and not so much the vital communications tool needed to push African development and innovation forward.

Governments will be able to use the surge in access to bring better services to people in rural areas.

Toby Shapshak, a technology trends expert, said that satellites offered the best option for African internet access. With the Facebook investment, the idea of bringing fast, reliable and cost-effective internet to Africa is slowly becoming a reality.

Korle Bu gets modern eye treatment centre

The Korle Bu Teaching Hospital Department of Ophthalmology is the beneficiary of a modern specialist eye centre, which will also serve as a West Africa regional surgical training facility.

The new stand-alone centre, named 'Lions International Eye Centre,' was made possible through a fundraising campaign, which raised over \$3 million, led by Moorfields Eye Hospital (MEH) of the United Kingdom and the Lions Club International (LCI).

Commenting on the new eye centre, Dr. Steven Akafo, a Consultant Ophthalmologist at Korle Bu Teaching Hospital, said: 'My vision is that no eye patient should have to leave Ghana for treatment.'

The centre has two theatres, three wards, a minor treatment room, a 12-bed bay, offices, and consultants rooms. There is also an optical shop that offers optometry services and dispenses spectacles.

A Past District Governor of LCI, Mrs



Gloria Lassey, said the LCI Foundation operated a 'Sightfirst' programme which funds the activities of Lions, non-governmental organisations, government agencies, and others to fight the major causes of preventable and reversible blindness. She said that the foundation also provided services for people who were blind or visually impaired by supporting eye healthcare delivery systems, training and infrastructure development, particularly in underserved communities throughout the world.

Twelve doctors have benefitted from four surgical training courses, which included glaucoma, small incision cataract surgery, eyelid surgery, and a special course for training of trainers.

'With the development of this new integrated training and treatment centre, West Africa will be a vanguard for sub-speciality training in ophthalmology, which is very exciting,' stated Dr. Murdoch.

Dr. Folasade Akinsola, Past Chairman, Faculty of Ophthalmology, West African College of Surgeons, also noted that, 'developing sub-specialist surgical skills will ensure comprehensive and quality eye health services are available across West Africa, reducing avoidable blindness in line with Vision 2020 objectives.'

Ethiopia to strengthen outbreak preparedness partnering with US CDC

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has awarded funds to the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM), and American Society for Microbiology (ASM) to support the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSa).

This investment will strengthen preparedness efforts to rapidly detect and respond to infectious diseases threats, such as Ebola and other emerging diseases. Additionally, the activities will advance progress toward compliance with the International Health Regulations, a World Health Organization effort to improve emergency preparedness and response capabilities in all countries.

These partnerships illustrate commitment to GHSa in Ethiopia and the acceleration of progress toward a country and

a world safe and secure from infectious disease threats. 'The recently released Health Sector Transformation Plan underscores how Ethiopia's strategy aligns with GHSa, which is a strong indication that EPHI can make significant strides towards preparedness,' said CDC Ethiopia Country Director Jeffrey Hanson.

GHSa promotes global health security as a national priority through targeted capacity building activities, such as improving laboratory systems, strengthening surveillance systems, expanding workforce development, and improving emergency management.

The US has also committed to helping at least 30 countries achieve all of capacity building targets of GHSa by the end of 2019, and is investing resources and technical assistance to attain this goal.

HIV vaccine could be a reality soon, say researchers



A South African research team has published a study that has significant implications for the development of an HIV vaccine, although how far away the practical application is, remains difficult to measure.

Researchers from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the Centre for the Aids Programme of Research in South Africa, and the University of Cape Town (UCT) released a statement confirming that their team, which included a PhD candidate at Wits, had published a seminal study that could be a decisive step towards a working vaccine.

The study, in a nutshell, focuses on a process that could drive the production of 'broadly neutralising' antibodies that could fight and destroy various mutations of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

'The development of a vaccine remains the best possibility for ending the HIV pandemic,' Wits's senior communications officer, Kemantha Govender, said. 'However, the researchers say that a major challenge has been the inability to stimulate broadly neutralising antibodies that are able to deal with the enormous variability of HIV.'

The PhD candidate, Jinal Bhiman, was the lead author of the study, which was published in the *Nature Medicine* journal.

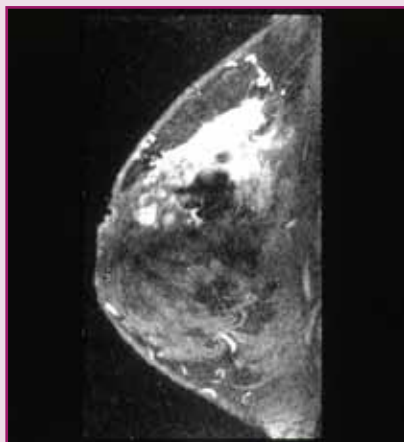
The researchers previously discovered a vulnerable spot on the outer shell of the HIV cell, which enabled the production of the powerful antibodies. During their long-term follow-ups with the patients participating in their study, they found that a glycan, a form of sugar, in a particular position on the protein coat covering the virus cell was a weak spot that could be attacked by the neutralising antibodies.

'We need to keep looking for a vaccine,' Goemaere said. 'It is difficult to predict how long it will take. It is very promising in the lab, but we still need to prove that for humans it can make a difference. It is just going to take time. We cannot bring down this epidemic just by treating all the cases; we need some preventive tools. In the long-term, we do need a vaccine.'

Photo credit: Alaine Kathryn Knipps; Parasitic Disease Branch (DPDX); Division of Parasitic Diseases and Malaria

Photo credit: Jon Rawlinson. <https://www.ft.com/photos/london/71462331>

Kenya first country to launch Novartis Access



Novartis announced the launch of Novartis Access in Kenya, the first country to benefit from a portfolio of 15 affordable medicines to treat cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, respiratory illnesses, and breast cancer.

The Novartis portfolio is being offered to the Kenyan government, non-governmental organisations, and other public-sector healthcare providers for US\$1 per treatment, per month.

'Novartis and Kenya have a relationship of more than 40 years, so I am delighted that Kenyan patients will be the first to benefit from Novartis Access,' said Joerg Reinhardt, Chairman of the Board of Novartis. 'The successful implementation of the programme in Kenya will be essential to guide the expansion of Novartis Access to other countries in the future.'

Some 28 million people die from chronic diseases in low- and middle-income countries each year, representing 75% of such deaths globally. In Kenya, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for 27% of deaths, or almost 100 000 people per year. By 2030, NCDs are expected to contribute to more than 60% of the total national mortality.

'I am excited by the proactive steps being taken by our government and Novartis in the fight against cancer and other chronic diseases,' said H.E. Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady of the Republic of Kenya. 'Novartis Access complements the advocacy campaign I have been undertaking together with other African First Ladies to expand access to prevention and treatment for people with chronic diseases.'

To find out more about Novartis Access, visit www.novartisaccess.com.

President of Liberia keynotes gala for Global Health to support infectious disease research

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia delivered the keynote address at the 11th Annual Gala for Global Health, as the Centre for Infectious Disease Research raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support its pioneering research to find vaccines, drugs and diagnostics for the world's deadliest infectious diseases.

More than 700 guests attended the event in Bellevue to support the Centre and see President Sirleaf speak about the challenges of leading a country devastated by Ebola and other infectious diseases. Paul G. Allen, philanthropist and founder and chairman of Vulcan Inc., was also in attendance to receive the Centre's 'Champion for Global Health Award'.

'It was a tremendous privilege to host President Sirleaf and Mr Allen at our gala,' said Alan Aderem, PhD, President and Director of the Centre for Infectious Disease Research. 'We are incredibly thankful to the hundreds of people who came to see these inspiring individuals speak and support our critical mission of developing vaccines, drugs and diagnostics to help save the lives of the millions of people who die from infectious diseases every year.'

At the conclusion of President Sirleaf's speech, Lisa Cohen, Execu-

tive Director of the Washington Global Health Alliance, moderated a question and answer session with President Sirleaf, Dr. Aderem, and Trevor Mundel, PhD, President of the Global Health Division of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

As well as being awarded the 'Champion for Global Health Award', Mr Allen has also been a key leader in the fight against Ebola. As the largest private donor, he pledged \$100 million to the effort and established The Paul G. Allen Ebola Programme, the only programme of its kind focused on ending Ebola in West Africa.

'Thanks to the courage and incredible work of thousands of people in the global and West African health communities, the leadership of President Sirleaf and other elected officials, and the tireless efforts of organisations, including the Centre for Infectious Disease Research, we have made meaningful progress in the fight against Ebola and other infectious diseases,' said Mr Allen.

Stefan Kappe, PhD, Professor and Director of translational science at the Centre for Infectious Disease Research, also announced during the gala that the Centre is in the process of finalising a new partnership with Group Health to begin the next phase of clinical trials for a promising malaria vaccine candidate.

Ebola crisis spurs new WHO reform programme

The World Health Organization (WHO) chief said preparedness, awareness, and transparency are at the heart of the WHO reform process.

WHO Director General Margaret Chan said many lessons have been learned from the Ebola epidemic in West Africa and these will be incorporated in the reform process that is underway.

She said being prepared is decisive in fighting any epidemic or pandemic of such magnitude. She said that involves shoring up and strengthening the resilience of fragile health systems in Africa and elsewhere in the world. 'In the past, when we talk about a health system, the

tendency is to talk about clinical care, curative care. And now we should integrate the public health disease surveillance and laboratory testing as part of the health system capability,' she stated.

As part of the reform programme, Dr. Chan said WHO is building a global emergency health work force. She said trained foreign medical teams will be on standby, ready to respond rapidly to a disease outbreak or natural disaster in any country.

She said decisive leadership, awareness of the dangers posed by an epidemic and being transparent about these problems are critical in controlling an outbreak.

KIT KATH⁺

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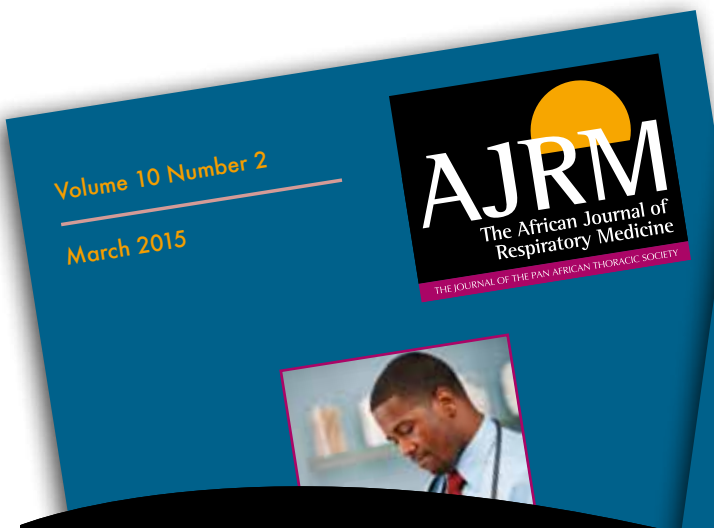


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