

Preparing for a future malaria vaccine in Africa: The Malaria Vaccine Decision-Making Framework

The PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have worked with the health ministries of several African countries to develop a tool that will facilitate making timely and informed decisions about malaria vaccine introduction into health systems in Africa. Known as the Malaria Vaccine Decision-Making Framework (DMF), this tool represents the kind of collaboration and preparation that will help countries avoid the delays seen in introducing lifesaving interventions in Africa.

The Malaria Vaccine Decision-Making Framework

MVI and WHO launched the DMF process in 2006 with support from the US Agency for International Development and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The process has involved working with African ministries of health to identify the information that countries need to make decisions regarding the appropriate use of a malaria vaccine as soon as the first is available. Using the WHO guidelines on introduction of new vaccines as a basis, MVI and WHO worked with countries to develop a framework that maps the data and processes required for national leaders to make informed decisions about future malaria vaccine use.

The framework lays out policy and programmatic issues to be considered for making a decision on malaria vaccine introduction and outlines processes required to support such a decision. It also gives a timeframe for collecting the data needed and putting in place the necessary processes relative to the timeline for vaccine licensure. Data and processes are required both at national and global levels.

The potential of timely decision-making

In the past, slow decision-making has resulted in a delay between the availability of lifesaving interventions and their use in developing-country health systems. In order to avoid the traditional time lag, countries and their partners must begin planning now. The first regulatory filing for the most advanced malaria vaccine candidate—GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals' RTS,S—could happen as early as 2012. By using a framework to guide decision-making, countries can reduce this delay for a malaria vaccine and ensure that an informed decision is made as soon after licensure as possible.

Progress to date

Work began in January 2006 on a generic decision-making framework that could be adapted to a specific country's needs. The Minister of Health of Benin hosted a workshop, collaboratively organized by MVI and WHO, where African experts on malaria immunization and health systems

and other development partners created the generic tool to aid timely, informed decision-making. MVI and WHO then consulted with stakeholders from six African countries—Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, and Tanzania—to adapt the framework to reflect the distinct circumstances of respective health systems. These country consultations engaged representatives from a range of constituencies, including from ministries of health, planning, and finance; WHO, the United Nations Children’s Fund; bilateral development partners; malaria scientists; and nongovernmental organizations. Each meeting generated a country-specific decision-making framework.

The six, country-specific frameworks have since been synthesized into a draft regional DMF, and consultations have been held with other countries—Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Malawi—to review the document. In all country consultations, plans were also developed to work on their national DMF.

In 2008, three sub-regional meetings for East and Southern Africa, West Africa, and Central Africa reviewed and validated the DMF as a decision-making tool for malaria vaccines. These meetings included malaria, immunization, and other technical experts from 30 countries and were supported by WHO and the Roll Back Malaria Partnership.

Beginning in January 2009, countries have been establishing working groups—with support from MVI and WHO country offices—to coordinate the implementation of the DMF. The working groups include the following:

- The DMF sub-committee in Burkina Faso, which falls within the Malaria Committee for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research.
- The Tanzania Malaria Vaccine Secretariat, coordinated by the country’s Expanded Programme on Immunization.
- The DMF Technical Advisory Group in Ghana, coordinated by WHO and the National Malaria Control Program.

Next steps

MVI will continue working with partners to support national working groups and to help establish DMF implementation structures in additional countries. A strategic document to guide DMF implementation at the country level will be also developed.

For more information about the DMF, please visit www.malvacdecision.net.

THE PATH MALARIA VACCINE INITIATIVE (MVI) is a global program established at PATH through an initial grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. MVI’s mission is to accelerate the development of malaria vaccines and ensure their availability and accessibility in the developing world. MVI’s vision is a world free from malaria. For more information, please visit www.malariavaccine.org.

PATH is an international nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH’s work improves global health and well-being. For more information, please visit www.path.org.