



## **Australia and Papua New Guinea launch efforts to crush deadly Hib disease in Pacific region**

**New vaccine rollout through the GAVI Alliance expected to help extinguish childhood killer**

**Canberra, Australia, 10 April 2008** — Papua New Guinea will begin immunising children this month with a vaccine that promises to rid the nation of *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, or Hib disease, one of the deadliest causes of meningitis and pneumonia.

An Australian contribution of US\$20 million through the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI Alliance) between 2006 and 2009 has greatly increased the Alliance's ability to accelerate and scale up global efforts against Hib.

The PNG campaign follows a highly successful movement in other parts of the world to combat Hib. A recent WHO study shows that Uganda, one of the first GAVI-eligible countries to implement a widespread Hib vaccination programme, saw a nearly 100 percent drop in Hib meningitis as a result. Similar success has been achieved in Bangladesh, Kenya, Chile, the Gambia, among others. Studies show that Hib vaccine cuts the incidence of disease by 88% or more within 3 to 5 years.

GAVI Executive Secretary Julian Lob-Levyt announced that GAVI and its partners plan to help national governments in Australia's neighbouring Asia-Pacific region immunise hundreds of thousands of children. Lob-Levyt will speak in Canberra today at the Sir Mark Oliphant Conference on Vaccine and Immunotherapy Technologies.

"Poor nations can't develop if their children don't survive to adulthood," said Lob-Levyt. "PNG's effort to immunise its children should serve as a beacon to other nations in the region to follow."

Lob-Levyt said that Solomon Islands and the Republic of Kiribati have been approved for Hib funding by the GAVI board and that Indonesia and East Timor are expected to apply.

Hib is a leading cause of pneumonia and meningitis, an inflammation of the lining covering the brain and spinal cord. Each year, Hib kills approximately 400,000 children under five years of age, most of them in the developing world. It is also responsible for approximately three million cases of serious illnesses resulting in long-term consequences such as deafness, paralysis, mental retardation and learning disabilities.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, most developed nations, including Australia, have introduced the Hib vaccine, virtually eliminating the disease. Poor countries have not had the same opportunity, until now.

Among PNG's population of 898,000 children under the age of five, 86 per 1,000 die before their fifth birthday – 10 times higher than their Australian neighbours.

"We became convinced of the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the Hib vaccine after reviewing promising data from countries where the vaccine had been introduced, as well as studies of Hib incidence in Indonesia and within PNG," said Dr Bill Lagani, Acting Director Health Improvement in PNG. "Vaccines such as this one are vital in helping us meet our commitment to protect our nation's most important resource—our children."

---

### **The GAVI Alliance**

The GAVI Alliance is a public-private partnership of major stakeholders in vaccines and immunisation. It includes developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry in both industrialised and developing countries, research and technical agencies, NGOs, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private philanthropists. WHO projections show that GAVI support has prevented more than 2.9 million future deaths by the end of 2007.

GAVI's efforts are critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goal on child health, which calls for reducing childhood mortality by two thirds by 2015. Of the 10 million children who die before reaching their fifth birthday every year, 2.5 million die from diseases that could be prevented with currently available or new vaccines. For more information, please visit: [www.gavialliance.org](http://www.gavialliance.org).

**For more information, please contact:**

Niall Byrne, GAVI, Sydney  
+61 3 9398 1416 office  
+61 417 131 977 mobile  
[niall@scienceinpublic.com.au](mailto:niall@scienceinpublic.com.au)

Geoff Adlide, GAVI  
Head Advocacy and Public Policy  
+41 79 240 4432 mobile

Jeffrey Rowland, GAVI, Geneva  
+41 22 909 7165 office  
+ 41 79 240 45 59 mobile  
[jrowland@gavialliance.org](mailto:jrowland@gavialliance.org)

B-roll: Download at

[http://www.gavialliance.org/media\\_centre/videos/broadcast/index.php](http://www.gavialliance.org/media_centre/videos/broadcast/index.php)