

## HEALTH

# Group Pledges \$150 Million in Bid To Boost Children's Vaccinations

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A new type of public-health organization, financed heavily with money from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is providing \$150 million to 13 developing nations for childhood vaccinations, initially against hepatitis B.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization was formed last year by Unicef, the World Health Organization and the World Bank with an initial five-year grant of \$750 million from the Gates foundation. Based in Geneva, GAVI was created to provide a quick and inexpensive way to increase sharply access to childhood immunizations in poor nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The first GAVI grants, totaling \$150 million and spanning five years, are aimed at immunizing by next year four million children, many of whom otherwise might not get protective vaccines against the hepatitis B virus, a blood-borne liver infection that is a leading cause of child deaths in developing nations.

Using a strategy being closely watched by other international health funders, the GAVI program asked countries to submit proposals for using the funds to supplement existing vaccine initiatives or to begin ones. The 13 countries receiving the first grants—only two months after proposal requests were received—include Rwanda and Mali, two especially poor African nations with limited ability to procure vaccines against hepatitis B. The only measure of success will be whether the nations meet their immunization goals, not how they do it—in an effort to eliminate a great deal of

## Preventable?

Annual world-wide estimated deaths from eight vaccine-preventable diseases

DISEASE	DEATH
Hepatitis B	900,000
Measles	888,000
Tetanus*	410,000
Haemophilus influenzae b	400,000
Pertussis	346,000
Yellow fever	30,000
Diphtheria	5,000
Polio	720

\*Includes 215,000 neonatal deaths

Source: Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization

bureacracy from existing programs.

"The idea behind GAVI is to make the funds available to the countries quickly, to spend the bulk of the money directly on acquiring the vaccines and on health services related to administering the vaccines, and then to closely audit the countries to make certain they achieve the immunization goals" they set, Tore Godal, GAVI's executive secretary, said.

Dr. Godal said GAVI was also created to demonstrate to drug makers that producing vaccines for diseases prevalent in the developing world can be profitable. Millions of doses of the vaccines will be purchased directly from drug companies at negotiated prices that the organizers hope will be profitable because of the large volume. GAVI aims to expand to include immunizations against diseases such as tu-

berculosis, measles and meningitis.

Jacques-Francois Martin, GAVI's president, said countries have shown an interest in the program because the countries have been able to customize strategies for meeting their immunization goals.

So far, GAVI has received an additional \$220 million in commitments during the five-year period from Norway, the United Kingdom and the U.S. Although President Clinton has asked Congress to give \$50 million to GAVI, that funding hasn't been allocated yet.