

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Africa-Europe partnership launches project to optimize malaria vaccine implementation and uptake**

*The OPT-MVAC consortium will support the rollout of malaria vaccines in 14 Central and West African countries*

- The WHO-recommended malaria vaccines can bolster malaria prevention strategies and help save tens of thousands of young lives annually.
- The OPT-MVAC consortium is leveraging the network developed through OPT-SMC, a consortium expanding the use of medicines (seasonal malaria chemoprevention) to protect children in Africa.
- The consortium will also promote broader vaccination acceptance and raise awareness about the importance of an integrated approach to malaria prevention and control, which optimally combines vaccines, drugs and bed nets.

**Geneva, Switzerland – 24 April 2025.** In 2023, the [World Health Organization updated its recommendation for malaria vaccines to include both the RTS,S/AS01 and R21/Matrix-M vaccines](#), representing a historic landmark in malaria prevention with the potential to save tens of thousands of young lives every year. However, to fully realize this potential, vaccine implementation must be accelerated and optimized to ensure access for the patients who need them most, particularly in settings where malaria transmission is highly seasonal.

To respond to this urgent need, eight European and African institutions have partnered with 14 Central and West African countries at various stages of malaria vaccine implementation to form the Optimising Malaria Vaccine Uptake (OPT-MVAC) consortium. Together, these partners will conduct vaccine implementation research to help optimize distribution strategies to local contexts and share best practices across their network.

The OPT-MVAC consortium benefits from the network, lessons learned and expertise developed through [OPT-SMC](#), a seasonal malaria chemoprevention optimization project featuring some of the same institutional partners, including London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Université Iba Der Thiam de Thiès, WHO-TDR and Medicines for Malaria Venture. Since malaria vaccines will be implemented alongside other preventive interventions, including chemoprevention medicines, the opportunity to combine drug and vaccine expertise can support efforts to operationalize both interventions.

Launched at the beginning of 2025, the 4-year OPT-MVAC project is co-funded by the [Global Health European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership 3 \(Global Health EDCTP3\) Joint Undertaking](#), the European Union, the [Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation \(SERI\)](#), the [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\)](#) and the [Access and Delivery Partnership \(ADP\)](#).

One of the partnership's central activities will be to collaborate with and provide grants to partner country national immunization, pharmacovigilance and malaria programmes to support the monitoring of vaccine introduction, as well as the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies to address potential barriers.

Africa continues to shoulder the vast majority of the global malaria burden and was home to an estimated 94% of global cases and 95% of malaria-related deaths in 2023. Moreover, children under 5 years old are the most vulnerable to severe disease and accounted for 76% of all malaria deaths in the region in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Today, after 10 years of stalled progress, we now have three powerful reasons to believe we can progress towards zero malaria deaths: new vector control tools, expanded use of preventive medicines like SMC and the first generation of vaccines. The tools complement each other and as per WHO, “the highest impact will be achieved using a mix of interventions.”

“Expanding the malaria prevention toolbox with vaccines and having countries take steps towards implementation are critical to their respective malaria control and elimination efforts,” says Dr Michel Vaillant, Head of the Competence Centre for Methodology and Statistics at the [Luxembourg Institute of Health](#), which is serving as the OPT-MVAC project coordinator. “Our project will build on this momentum by leveraging the efforts of partnering countries to accelerate the delivery of vaccines and expand coverage.”

## Building on partnerships to expand malaria prevention interventions

OPT-MVAC is modelled after the EDCTP2 co-funded OPT-SMC consortium, which collaborates with national malaria programmes in many of the same West and Central African countries to optimize the delivery of SMC.

In 2024, on average, 54 million children at risk of severe malaria received SMC, compared to just 170,000 children in 2012<sup>2</sup> — when the intervention was first implemented — across 19 African countries where disease transmission is highly seasonal. This scale-up, which has been facilitated by projects like OPT-SMC, has [helped save hundreds of thousands of young lives](#).

“The OPT-MVAC consortium consists of the same institutional OPT-SMC partners – with the addition of four more to bolster vaccine-specific expertise – as well as many of the same West and Central African implementation country partners,” says Jean-Louis Abdourahim Ndiaye, Director of Research and Scientific Innovation at the [Université Iba Der Thiam de Thiès](#) in Senegal, which is serving as scientific lead for OPT-MVAC. “We are leveraging our network of partners experienced in malaria prevention to accelerate malaria vaccine implementation, while also promoting broader vaccination acceptance and raising awareness about the importance of malaria prevention and control.”

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<sup>1</sup> [WHO World malaria report 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [WHO World malaria report 2024](#)

## Kick-off meeting and pharmacovigilance workshop

From 28 April to 2 May, OPT-MVAC institutional and implementing country partners will convene in Rabat, Morocco for a week-long kick-off meeting. The meeting will consist of pharmacovigilance workshops and partner countries sharing updates on the current status of their malaria vaccine implementation efforts.

The [Rabat Collaborating Center](#), which is leading the project's workstream on safety and pharmacovigilance for malaria vaccines, will host the meeting. The participation of national immunization, pharmacovigilance and malaria programmes of partner countries on hand to kick off the project underscores their role in driving its success, as their respective implementation experiences can further support malaria vaccine uptake across the region.

"I am hopeful that this initiative will help better understand the acceptability of the malaria vaccine within communities, as well as its impact on malaria morbidity and mortality among children under 5 in the West African sub-region," says Professor Tchin Darre, Togo's Minister of Health and Public Hygiene. "The expected outcomes of this project will effectively guide our decision-making to better protect children and contribute to their healthy growth and development, ensuring the human capital of tomorrow."

## About OPT-MVAC

OPT-MVAC's eight institutional partners are [Luxembourg Institute of Health](#) (Luxembourg), [Université Iba Der Thiam de Thiès](#) (Senegal), [Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar](#) (Senegal), [European Vaccine Initiative](#) (Germany), the [UNICEF/UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases – TDR](#) (Switzerland), [Medicines for Malaria Venture](#) (MMV, Switzerland), [Rabat Collaborating Center](#) (Morocco) and [London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine](#) (United Kingdom).

The project's 14 implementing country partners, represented by their respective national immunization, pharmacovigilance and malaria programmes, are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

## About MMV

MMV is a Swiss-based not-for-profit organization working to deliver a portfolio of accessible medicines with the power to treat, prevent and eliminate malaria. Born in 1999, out of a need for greater health equity, we close critical gaps in research, development and access – working "end-to-end" to expand the use of existing antimalarials and innovate new compounds to protect public health. This starts with women and children.

It's working. As of 2024, MMV-supported products have effectively protected or treated an estimated 711 million people and saved around 17.4 million lives. We cannot stop now.

However, with a quarter of a billion malaria cases and nearly 600,000 deaths reported in 2023, progress towards disease elimination has stalled. MMV is part of an ecosystem of partners determined to change this. Bringing public and private sector partners together, we pioneer new solutions that align with local and global health priorities and promote the equitable development of effective and affordable products that work to help end malaria and advance health for all.

For more information, visit [www.mmv.org](http://www.mmv.org).

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