

PRNewswire -- Today at the Clinton Global Initiative annual conference, PATH announced the introduction of a ground-breaking **vaccine** to eliminate epidemic meningitis in Burkina Faso.

The meningococcal conjugate **vaccine**, developed by the Meningitis **Vaccine** Project, a partnership between the World Health Organization and PATH and produced by Serum Institute of India Limited has been developed for serogroup A Neisseria meningitidis (meningococcus), the principal cause of meningitis epidemics in Africa for more than 100 years.

The Michael & Susan **Dell Foundation** is committing \$4 million to the project that will vaccinate more than nine million people between the ages of 1 and 29 against meningitis.

The Meningitis **Vaccine** Project, a partnership between PATH and WHO, will continue to raise the remainder of the \$14 million required to conduct the initial activities.

More than 700,000 cases of the disease have been reported in the past ten years alone. The disease is virtually unknown in the United States, yet causes devastating loss of life and permanent disability in Africa.

"The introduction of the **vaccine** in Burkina Faso will set the stage for the ultimate elimination of meningitis in sub-Saharan Africa. The support from the **Dell Foundation** and other funders to roll out this life-saving **vaccine** is most welcome," said Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, Director, WHO Initiative for **Vaccine** Research.

"Now that a meningitis **vaccine** has been developed, with licensure anticipated in late 2008, an end to this devastating but neglected disease is within our grasp," said PATH president Christopher J. Elias, MD, MPH. "This project is a critical first step to providing evidence that epidemic meningitis can be eliminated on a country by country basis."

"We are committed to supporting international organizations working on the ground to save lives, reduce disease, and break the cycle of poverty through proven, highly cost-effective interventions with immediate, measurable results," said Janet Mountain, executive director, Michael & Susan **Dell Foundation**. "Our cooperation with PATH and WHO, on the Meningitis **Vaccine** Project is another step in an established project that holds the promise to eliminate the dreaded meningitis epidemics in Africa."

The venture will be carried out in three phases, culminating in June 2009. The first phase will focus on preparing and strengthening the existing health care systems in Burkina Faso, while the second phase will be the actual mass- vaccination campaign. The third phase will focus on evaluation, since the Burkina Faso results will be used to raise an additional \$400 million for **vaccine** scale-up in the remaining 20 meningitis belt countries. The Meningitis **Vaccine** Project was originally funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

PATH (<http://www.path.org>) is an international, nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health.

Michael & Susan **Dell Foundation** (<http://www.msdf.org>) was established in 1999 by the Dell family to measurably improve outcomes for children living in urban poverty. Based in Austin, **Texas**, the Foundation funds programs that foster and improve education, health, and safety for children around the world. With an endowment of more than \$1 billion, the Foundation has committed more than \$350 million to global children's issues and Central **Texas** community initiatives to date.

WHO (<http://www.who.int>), the United Nations' specialized agency for health, was established in 1948. WHO's objective, as set out in its Constitution, is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health, defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well- being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

The Meningitis **Vaccine** Project (<http://www.meningvax.org>) is a partnership between PATH and the World

Health Organization, established to develop and introduce meningitis vaccines.

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