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New Studies on Pneumococcal Disease in Africa Reinforce Need for Life-Saving Vaccines

*Pneumococcal disease poses highest risk, takes most devastating toll in Africa,
yet is preventable with vaccines available now*

*Leading scientific experts applaud South Africa as first African country to introduce vaccine, urge other
countries to follow suit*

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa – Two new studies from the Pneumococcal Awareness Council of Experts (PACE) highlight the increased risk for children in Africa of contracting pneumococcal disease and suffering its devastating consequences. The studies were presented today at the Sabin Vaccine Institute's 4th Regional Pneumococcal Symposium in Johannesburg, South Africa. According to PACE, the results reinforce the urgent need for improving access to life-saving vaccines and treatments throughout the continent. The South African Ministry of Health was honored for its leadership in making South Africa the first country in Africa to introduce pneumococcal vaccine.

"In light of the risks and devastating consequences of pneumococcal disease, particularly in Africa, protecting African children from this disease is an urgent priority," said Ciro A. de Quadros, executive vice president of the Sabin Vaccine Institute and co-chair of PACE. "We urge countries in Africa and throughout the developing world to follow South Africa's example and ensure vaccines are available to those that need them most."

Specifically, the PACE studies show:

- Sickle cell disease, which is common in many parts of Africa, increases the risk of pneumococcal disease by 37 times, and together with HIV infection, malnutrition and indoor air pollution, puts African children at high risk.
- Even when treated with antibiotics in a hospital, up to one-half of all children in Africa who get pneumococcal meningitis will either die or be disabled as a consequence of the disease.

"By increasing the priority to prevent pneumonia, meningitis and pneumococcal disease, African countries can make substantial progress towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals for improved child survival and health," said Orin Levine, executive director of PneumoADIP and co-chair of PACE. "Thanks to technologic advances from the vaccine industry and global funding commitments from donors and foundations, pneumococcal vaccines have the power to save millions of children."

"Millions of lives can be saved through the routine introduction of the pneumococcal vaccine in developing countries," said Dr. Jean Marie Okwo-Bele, director of the WHO Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals. "The World Health Organization recommends that countries at all income levels introduce this vaccine, with the highest priority given to countries with high child mortality rates."

(more)

South Africa recently became the first country in Africa to introduce pneumococcal vaccine, and Rwanda and the Gambia will introduce it this year with support from the GAVI Alliance. Leading scientists who gathered in Johannesburg recognized the South African Minister of Health Barbara Hogan for the ministry's leadership and urged other countries throughout Africa and the world to follow its example.

"South Africa is proud to have made pneumococcal prevention a priority, and we see it as an investment in healthy children, strong families, and a growing economy," said Minister of Health Hogan. "I urge other African countries to take this important step. Together, we can achieve the day when one African child dying of a preventable disease is one too many."

Preventing and controlling pneumococcal disease requires an integrated approach. Effective treatment of pneumococcal disease can reduce the consequences of the illness, but many African children and adults lack access to quality care when they are ill. Vaccination programs, on the other hand, often reach 70 percent to 90 percent of children in African countries. While efforts are underway to expand access to quality care for all children and adults, preventive interventions such as pneumococcal vaccination can help prevent these cases from occurring.

As a result of collaborative efforts by WHO, UNICEF, the GAVI Alliance, academia, foundations, industry and developing country governments, estimates indicate that developing countries are now able to introduce affordable pneumococcal vaccines at least 10 years faster than historical precedents.

Safe and effective vaccines currently exist to prevent pneumococcal deaths in children and adults. Two pneumococcal conjugate vaccines are now licensed and available; one contains seven important pneumococcal serotypes and the other contains 10. Since U.S. infants began receiving routine pneumococcal conjugate vaccination in 2000, the country has nearly eliminated childhood pneumococcal disease caused by strains in the vaccine.

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*The **Pneumococcal Awareness Council of Experts (PACE)**, a project of the Sabin Vaccine Institute, is comprised of leading global experts in infectious diseases and vaccines. The Council raises awareness among policy-makers and aims to secure global commitments to prevent pneumococcal disease, a leading infectious killer of children and adults worldwide. The Council works through collaboration and partnership with countries, NGOs, academia and industry to achieve its goals. To learn more, visit www.sabin.org/PACE.*

*The **Sabin Vaccine Institute** is a nonprofit public organization dedicated to saving lives by stimulating the development and distribution of vaccines throughout the world. The Institute is committed to continuing the work of Dr. Albert Sabin, developer of the oral live virus polio vaccine, who envisioned the enormous potential of vaccines to prevent deadly diseases. To learn more, visit www.sabin.org.*