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WHO recommends R21 vaccine for malaria prevention in updated advice on immunisation

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R21 and RTS,S vaccines act against P. falciparum, the deadliest malaria parasite and the most prevalent on the African continent



The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended a new vaccine, R21/Matrix-M (developed by the University of Oxford and the Serum Institute of India), for the prevention of malaria in children. The recommendation follows advice from the WHO: Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) and the Malaria Policy Advisory Group (MPAG) and was endorsed by the WHO Director-General following its regular biannual meeting held on 25-29 September.

WHO also issued recommendations on the advice of SAGE for new vaccines for dengue and meningitis, along with immunization schedule and product recommendations for COVID-19. WHO also issued key immunisation programmatic recommendations on polio, IA2030 and recovering the immunization programme.

The R21 vaccine is the second malaria vaccine recommended by WHO, following the RTS,S/AS01 vaccine, which received a WHO recommendation in 2021. Both vaccines are shown to be safe and effective in preventing malaria in children and, when implemented broadly, are expected to have high public health impact. Malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, places a particularly high burden on children in the African Region, where nearly half a million children die from the disease each year.

Demand for malaria vaccines is unprecedented; however, available supply of RTS,S is limited. The addition of R21 to the list of WHO-recommended malaria vaccines is expected to result in sufficient vaccine supply to benefit all children living in areas where malaria is a public health risk.