

Serum Institute starts supplying oral polio vaccine

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After staying away from the crowded space of OPV suppliers in India, Serum Institute of India has finally joined the pack, by starting the production of its brand of the vaccine. At the recently organized Vaccine World Summit 2013 in Pune, where SII is situated, Dr Suresh Jadhav, executive director, SII told BioSpectrum that it received a prequalification approval for the oral polio vaccine in February 2013. Today, its supply to UNICEF has already been initiated.

While admitting that SII is a late entrant into this space, Dr Jadhav said that other events led them to taking this step. "Since the supply from two other Indian suppliers for the OPV had to be stopped due to some regulatory issues, the UN agencies were facing a shortage of vaccines. We were then asked by the UN agencies to address this issue, and we have now risen to fill in the shortfall."

India has not reported a single polio case for the last two years, and is considered to be a model country when it comes to putting a concerted effort for polio eradication. Currently, polio is said to be present in just three countries of the world, namely, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. The OPV program is set to be phased out by 2018, after which IPV (Injectible Polio Vaccine) will be administered to infants. This measure is to prevent cases of vaccine derived polio virus. Currently one of the main challenges to using IPV is its cost which is approximately \$2.66 per dose, as compared to \$0.14 for OPV. A number of manufacturers worldwide are working towards reducing the cost of a single dose of IPV to less than a dollar. At the same event, Dr Cyrus Poonawalla commented that SII would try to offer its brand of IPV at \$0.93 per dose.

However, the demand for OPV will not die down even then. Dr Jadhav added that, once the two course OPV administration will be replaced by newer one for IPV, it will still have at least one dose of OPV.

Serum Institute had been adjudged the Number 1 biotech company in the BioSpectrum-ABLE Top 20 Survey conducted in 2012. It had acquired Bilthoven Biologicals in July 2012, and with it gained access to the technical know-how for manufacturing Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV).