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Sanofi Pasteur, the vaccines division of Sanofi, announced that the first shipment of ShanIPV, a brand new injectable, inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) manufactured by its affiliate Shantha Biotechnics, in Hyderabad, India, will occur in a couple of days.

These first vaccine doses will be available to implement one dose of IPV in India's immunization schedule for all infants.

Today, India is officially introducing IPV in their national immunization schedule, to supplement the iconic "drops on sugar" of oral polio vaccine (OPV).

Over 20 million newborns will eventually benefit from this new vaccine every year.

This is a critical step towards a polio-free future, a prospect that is now very close.

India's 2014 certification as polio-free reassured experts that the decades-long global fight against polio was finally drawing to an end.

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Sanofi Pasteur and its affiliate Shantha Biotechnics will together produce most of India's IPV supply.

"With the introduction of IPV in their immunization schedule, India moves the world much closer to being polio-free", said Mr Olivier Charmeil, President and CEO, Sanofi Pasteur. "As a company deeply rooted in India, we are very proud that vaccines produced by both Sanofi Pasteur and Shantha will be used in this vital step towards a polio-free world. We have worked as partners of the government of India for many years, with this day in mind."

Only two countries in the world are still classified as polio endemic, meaning that wild polio virus passes routinely between members of the community. However, great progress has been made in both countries and the last case of polio in the world may possibly be only months away.

OPV has been instrumental in ending polio cases in India and has been used across the world to reduce the number of cases of polio by over 99 percent in the past twenty years.

Today, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that the live OPV be supplemented and then replaced by an inactivated IPV.

OPV and IPV stimulate the body's immune system in slightly different ways so children who receive both should be even better protected against the disease.

When the world is polio-free, IPV will be the only vaccine used to make sure that the disease never comes back, according to a 2012 WHO policy.

OPV contains a mixture of live attenuated poliovirus strains.

Although OPV is safe it is not advisable to be used after achieving a polio-free status: when polio no longer exists in the wild, live virus cannot still exist in a vaccine.

The universal introduction of IPV, a vaccine that has been used in many countries of the world for years, is a necessary step towards achieving a polio-free world by 2019 according to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) Endgame Strategic Plan.

Today, more than 110 countries have introduced IPV in their immunization calendars.

In February 2014, Sanofi Pasteur - the world's largest producer of IPV - and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a joint price support mechanism, including a financial contribution from both organizations.

The mechanism allows Gavi to make IPV available for inclusion in the routine immunization schedules in 73 of the world's poorest countries.

Sanofi Pasteur, as a leader in providing both OPV and IPV, has been a partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative for over 20 years.
The company has provided more than five billion doses of OPV to UNICEF over last two decades.

In 1982, Sanofi Pasteur registered the first enhanced-potency inactivated polio vaccine (IPV), which is now distributed globally as a stand-alone poliovirus vaccine as well as in combination pediatric vaccines to immunize against many diseases in a single shot.

Since then, Sanofi Pasteur has distributed more than one billion doses of IPV and IPV-containing vaccines.