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Optimising the delivery and uptake of malaria vaccines in countries with areas of highly seasonal transmission in West and Central Africa

The availability of effective malaria vaccines is a historic landmark that could save tens of thousands of young lives every year. However, to fully realise this potential, implementation and uptake must be accelerated, optimised and adapted to local contexts. Following the success of the Malaria Vaccine Implementation Programme (MVIP) in Ghana, Malawi and Kenya, WHO recommended the RTS, S vaccine in 2021 to help prevent the disease in children. Two years later, WHO expanded its recommendation for children living in malaria-endemic areas to include the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine. Now, with malaria vaccine supplies able to meet rising demands, 14 West and Central African countries, with areas of high seasonal malaria transmission, are pursuing implementation. They remain at different stages of this process, but can benefit from an established network of partners collaborating to accelerate vaccine implementation efforts.

Consortium objectives

OPT-MVAC will optimise the delivery and uptake of malaria vaccines through collaboration with national immunisation, pharmacovigilance and malaria programmes in 14 West and Central African countries with highly seasonal malaria transmission. Together, we will conduct implementation research to optimise delivery approaches to local contexts and share data and best practices across the network of implementation partner countries.

Since administering the four-dose malaria vaccine schedule requires additional immunisation visits, children will also have the opportunity to catch up on other vaccines. Moreover, optimising the implementation of malaria vaccines will help further raise awareness about the importance of malaria elimination and prevention, which can strengthen trust in malaria vaccines - as observed during pilot implementation programmes - and promote broader vaccination acceptance.

Central to its activities, OPT-MVAC will collaborate with and provide grants and technical support to national programmes of the partner countries to facilitate the evaluation of vaccine introduction in terms of vaccine coverage, as well as the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies to address the gaps, vaccine hesitancy and other barriers to increased uptake.











Partners

The 14 OPT-MVAC implementation partner countries, represented by their respective national immunisation, pharmacovigilance and malaria programmes, are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

The OPT-MVAC consortium also includes eight institutional partners experienced in the deployment of malaria control and prevention interventions, implementation research, statistics and data management, pharmacovigilance and capacity strengthening:

- Luxembourg Institute of Health (Luxembourg) Coordinator
- Université Iba Der Thiam de Thiès (Senegal) Scientific lead
- Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (Senegal)
- European Vaccine Initiative (Germany)
- UNICEF/UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR, Switzerland)
- Medicines for Malaria Venture (Switzerland)
- Rabat Collaborating Centre (Morocco)
- London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (United Kingdom)

Funders

The 4-year (January 2025 – April 2029) OPT-MVAC project is co-funded by the Global Health EDCTP3 Joint Undertaking (Global Health EDCTP3 JU), the European Union, the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), the Access and Delivery Partnership (ADP) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI).

Expected impact

Our collaborative work is designed for lasting impact by:

- Protecting the youngest children against malaria through higher vaccine coverage, encouraging longer and healthier lives.
- Strengthening and expanding a network of endemic countries collaborating to develop and evaluate strategies, enhance safety monitoring, generate robust data and share expertise and lessons learned to strengthen the uptake of malaria and other vaccines.
- Fostering long-term EU/AU partnerships, translating innovations into tangible outcomes and strengthening research capacity among national programmes and their institutional research partners.
- Contributing to the Global Health EDCTP3 J U objectives by reducing the infectious disease burden and increasing health security in sub-Saharan Africa through the uptake and research on malaria vaccines.
- Progressing towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3 while improving access to essential health services promoting disease prevention.
- Expanding equitable scientific partnerships based on co-ownership, mutual interest and strategic priorities.













OPT-MVAC Work Packages

Work Package 1 – Project management

Led by Michel Vaillant (Luxembourg Institute of Health)

WP1 will ensure the project's objectives, milestones and deliverables are achieved and the workplan is implemented in compliance with the Grant Agreement and the Consortium Agreement. Responsibilities include project support for financial management, logistics, internal communications and coordination, in compliance with European Commission rules and procedures.

Work Package 2 – Scientific leadership, implementation research, training and research capacity development

Led by Jean-Louis Abdourahim Ndiaye (Université Iba Der Thiam de Thiès)

WP2 will define project priorities and ensure compliance with good clinical practices and international standards. It will provide technical support and training to participating countries to adapt and implement the generic research protocol to their settings and develop mitigation strategies to address any risks.

Work Package 3 – Epidemiological methods, statistics and data management Led by Paul Milligan (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine)

WP3 will support reliable and timely data generation to drive improvements in immunisation performance. Activities will include harmonising monitoring and evaluation methods across countries to ensure data are comparable and supporting the ethical conduct of data collection, data integrity and data quality.

Work Package 4 – Safety and pharmacovigilance for malaria vaccines

Led by Rachida Soulaymani (Rabat Collaborating Centre)

WP4 will ensure the selection of administered vaccines in participating countries is based on a positive balance between benefits and risks; that pharmacovigilance systems have the capacity to collect and analyse data to proactively address risks; and that necessary resources are allocated to support the smooth pharmacovigilance operations.

Work Package 5 – Communications, dissemination and exploitation

Led by André-Marie Tchouatieu (Medicines for Malaria Venture)

WP5 will share information about the project, its progress and its findings with key stakeholders and engage in activities to facilitate improved access, coverage and trust in vaccines against all preventable infectious diseases

Visit the project website <u>www.opt-mvac.org</u> or contact <u>tchouatieua@mmv.org</u> for inquiries and more information.













