Working Group Non-specific effects of vaccines
Terms of Reference

WHO’s Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) has requested the WHO Secretariat to review the evidence concerning the possible non-specific effects of vaccines included in the routine infant immunization schedule.

Preparatory to such a review of the evidence by SAGE in 2013, it is necessary to:

- systematically review all published and grey literature concerning epidemiological studies addressing “non-specific” effects of BCG, measles and, DTP-containing vaccines on survival/all-cause mortality in children under five years of age and,
- critically appraise the evidence using the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) guidelines.

The Working Group will be asked to determine if the current evidence is sufficient to lead to adjustments in policy recommendations or to warrant further scientific investigation, and if so, to define the path towards obtaining unequivocal evidence on these issues that would support future robust, evidence-based adjustments in immunization policies, if warranted.

Guidance for the development of evidence-based vaccine related recommendations.

The Working Group will specifically be asked to:

1. Review and provide guidance on the protocol for two independent systematic reviews (one on epidemiological studies and one on immunological factors) on the evidence of selected vaccines on child survival/ deaths by all causes in children less than 5 years of age.
2. Review the available evidence that addresses the effect of BCG, DTP and measles-containing vaccines on survival/all-cause mortality in children less than five years of age and, the outcomes of the above mentioned reviews and related GRADE tables.
3. Determine if the current evidence on non-specific effects of vaccines is sufficient to lead to adjustments in policy recommendations or to warrant further scientific investigation.

Expertise needed in:

1. Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, tuberculosis and measles vaccines against those diseases.
2. Infectious disease epidemiology (in particular, expertise in confounding evaluation, clinical and community trial and epidemiologic study designs and their appraisal)
3. Statistics (in particular survival analysis, landmark analysis, assessment of complex interactions)
4. Systematic reviews including of observational studies
5. Pharmacoepidemiology
6. Immunology