Rwanda Becomes First Developing Nation to Introduce Vaccine for World’s Leading Infectious Child Killer

Introduction of Pneumococcal Vaccine Promises to Help Country Achieve Significant Reduction in Child Deaths by 2015 and Marks a Major Milestone for Disease Prevention in the Developing World

KIGALI, Rwanda – International leaders in global health joined Rwandan government officials and hundreds of parents and children at a rural clinic east of Kigali today to celebrate the launch of the first national immunisation programme against pneumococcal disease in a developing country. Pneumococcal disease, which can cause potentially life-threatening illnesses such as pneumonia, meningitis and sepsis, is the leading vaccine-preventable killer of children younger than five worldwide.

Dr. Richard Sezibera, Rwanda’s Minister of Health, led a group of doctors and nurses in administering the first doses of Wyeth’s pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, Prevenar*, to Rwandan children. The event marked the first step in the rollout of the national pneumococcal immunisation programme, which aims to vaccinate nearly all Rwandan children younger than one by the end of 2009, and all Rwandan infants on a routine basis, thereafter.

“This is a proud day for Rwanda and an important milestone for the developing world,” said Dr. Sezibera. “We are committed to saving the lives and improving the health of our most precious national resource – our children. With the introduction of this vaccine, our goal of significantly reducing child death in Rwanda will now be within reach.”

A Major Step Forward for Developing Countries

While 35 high- and middle-income countries, including South Africa, currently provide routine childhood immunisation against pneumococcal disease, the introduction of the vaccine in Rwanda signals a new era in vaccine access and delivery in the developing world. Thanks to the partnership between developing countries, donor governments and industry, the GAVI Alliance will be able to offer the same access to life-saving, new-generation vaccines currently utilized throughout the industrialised world.

“We applaud the Rwandan government for taking this step, and we are proud to join them in launching a new era in the delivery of vaccines designed to close the gap between rich and poor countries and improve child mortality throughout the developing world. If fully rolled out in GAVI countries, the pneumococcal vaccine could save the lives of more than 440,000 children by 2015. This would help achieve Millennium Development Goal 4,” said Dr. Julian Lob-Levyt, CEO of the GAVI Alliance. “Today's event would not be possible without the commitment of public and private partners who are making vaccines available to the poorest countries.”

“Combating the burden of serious disease globally is an important part of Wyeth’s mission,” said Bernard Poussot, Chairman, President and CEO of Wyeth, which donated Prevenar to Rwanda and the Gambia through the GAVI Alliance. “Wyeth is committed to protecting current and future generations from pneumococcal disease and continuing to expand access to Wyeth’s pneumococcal conjugate vaccine around the world. It is in that tradition that Wyeth is honoured to provide GAVI with more than three million doses of Prevenar to help Rwanda and the Gambia protect its children against the potentially devastating consequences of this disease.”

The millennium development goal (MDG) related to child health, MDG4, addresses a serious disparity in child mortality, which is much higher in poor versus wealthy nations, and which is significantly driven by lack of access to appropriate health care, including treatment and prevention of serious infections. The routine use of new vaccines against the two leading killers of children under age five, pneumonia and diarrheal diseases, could save more than 800,000 lives by 2015 and put low-income countries significantly closer to reaching their MDG4 targets.

To help make this program possible in Rwanda, and in the Gambia in June of this year, Wyeth contributed more than three million doses of the pneumococcal vaccine through GAVI. Prevenar, originally introduced by Wyeth Pharmaceuticals in the United States in 2000, is the first new generation vaccine to be introduced to the developing world by the GAVI Alliance. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided extensive
technical support and worked closely with the Rwandan Ministry of Health to make the rollout of pneumococcal vaccine a possibility. In addition, the World Health Organisation provided technical support and USAID donated cold storage equipment where the vaccine is kept until it is administered.

The Devastating Toll of Pneumococcal Disease
Pneumococcal disease takes the lives of 1.6 million people each year – including up to one million children under five years of age. More than 90 percent of these deaths occur in developing countries. Pneumonia, the most common form of serious pneumococcal disease, accounts for one in every four child deaths, making it the leading cause of death among children younger than 5 years of age.

A Sustainable Strategy for Reducing Child Mortality
Since 2000, GAVI, a global partnership that includes WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank and funded by donor countries and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has achieved remarkable success in creating and implementing new methods of development assistance for health. Its focus has been to provide innovative financial support to accelerate the introduction of basic vaccines and strengthen health systems in developing countries, including in Rwanda. As a result, more than 200 million children in 72 countries have been immunised against as many as six common, life-threatening diseases. The Alliance is now expanding its support for new generation vaccines including against pneumococcal and rotavirus.

The Promise of Next Generation Pneumococcal Vaccines
To ensure the sustainable supply of pneumococcal vaccines to countries in the future, GAVI has launched a unique financing mechanism known as the Advance Market Commitment (AMC). The governments of Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, and Russia, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched a pilot AMC against pneumococcal disease with a collective US$ 1.5 billion commitment. The pilot is expected to begin implementation in the next few months. New pneumococcal vaccines currently under development may be eligible for AMC funding.

“Financial barriers to vaccines have been overcome,” said Dr. Orin Levine, Executive Director of GAVI’s Pneumococcal Accelerated Development and Introduction Plan (PneumoADIP). “The price of action will be measured in dollars. The price of inaction will be measured by the number of children who will lose their lives to a preventable disease.”

Private industry continues its efforts to deliver new vaccines that offer protection against the strains of pneumococcal disease that are most prevalent in the developing world. “Wyeth applauds GAVI, the World Bank, and donors for developing innovative finance instruments such as the Advance Market Commitment to spur the development of new vaccines for countries in need. We look forward to working together with GAVI and other global partners to help make the AMC pilot a reality,” added Mr. Poussot.

For more information, please contact Jeffrey Rowland (GAVI Alliance) + 41 79 240 45 59, jrowland@gavialliance.org; Julie Buss (PneumoADIP) +1 443 315 7209, jbuss@jhsph.edu; Lili Gordon (Wyeth) +1 610 316 1303, gordonl2@wyeth.com; or Fidele Ngabo (Rwanda Ministry of Health) +000250 0788304750, fidele.ngabo@moh.gov.rw.

Note to Broadcasters:
Professionally filmed video B-Roll shot in Rwanda this week (April 22-24) is available for download at http://www.rockhopper.tv/gavi/downloads.aspx and http://www.rockhopper.tv/gavi/ from 0001 GMT Friday April 24 and will also be available to APTN subscribers via APTN Global Video Wire on Friday April 24 at 1415 GMT. The rights-free B-roll will include footage of health clinics in Rwanda, the first children to be immunised and interviews in English. For further information please contact Colin McCallum at Rockhopper TV +44 208 969 1616 or mobile +44 7941 233760 or Bart Stobart at APTN + 44 207 482 7454.

# # #
About Pneumococcal Disease
*Streptococcus pneumoniae*, also known as the pneumococcus, is a bacterium frequently found in the upper respiratory tract of healthy children and adults. The bacterium, however, cause a range of infections – from relatively mild ear infections to fatal pneumonia, meningitis and sepsis. Serious pneumococcal infections are most common in young children (especially those < 2 years old), the elderly and immune compromised individuals such as those who are undernourished or HIV positive.

The pneumococcus is the main cause of pneumonia, which kills more children than any other disease. Pneumonia causes nearly 1 in 5 deaths of children under five worldwide and kills more children than AIDS, malaria and measles combined. For those children in developing countries who contract and survive pneumococcal meningitis, one in four are left with serious disabilities, including neurological damage, kidney disease, deafness, limb amputations, and developmental delays.

About the GAVI Alliance
The GAVI Alliance (formerly the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation) is a public-private partnership of major stakeholders in immunisation and health system support. It includes developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry in both industrialised and developing countries, research and technical agencies, civil society, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and individuals. WHO projections show that GAVI support has prevented more than 3.4 million future deaths by the end of 2008. Visit [www.gavialliance.org](http://www.gavialliance.org).

About Wyeth
Wyeth is one of the world’s largest research-driven pharmaceutical and health care products companies. It is a leader in the discovery, development, manufacturing and marketing of pharmaceuticals, vaccines, biotechnology products, nutritionals and non-prescription medicines that improve the quality of life for people worldwide. The Company’s major divisions include Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, Wyeth Consumer Healthcare and Fort Dodge Animal Health. Visit [www.wyeth.com](http://www.wyeth.com).

About PneumoADIP
PneumoADIP is a small, dedicated team based at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health – the world’s largest school of public health – and is supported by a grant from the GAVI Alliance (GAVI). PneumoADIP’s mission is to improve child survival and health by accelerating the evaluation of and access to new, lifesaving pneumococcal vaccines for the world’s children. PneumoADIP coordinates its activities through a strategic alliance with the World Health Organisation and aims to achieve its goals through partnerships with countries, donors, academia, international organisations, and industry. Visit [www.preventpneumo.org](http://www.preventpneumo.org) or [www.jhsph.edu](http://www.jhsph.edu).

**Prevenar™**
Prevenar™ (Pneumococcal 7-valent Conjugate Vaccine) is approved by the World Health Organization for active immunisation of infants and children from 6 weeks through 9 years of age against invasive disease, pneumonia, and otitis media caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* serotypes 4, 6B, 9V, 14, 18C, 19F and 23F. Prevenar may be given at the same time as DTP, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella, polio (OPV or IPV) and varicella. The use of Prevenar should be based on official recommendations taking into consideration the impact of invasive disease in different age groups as well as variability of serotype epidemiology in different geographic areas.

A PCV7 fact sheet is available upon request.

**Important Safety Information for Prevenar™**
In clinical trials, the most frequently reported adverse events included injection site reactions, fever (≥38°C/100.4°F), irritability, drowsiness, restless sleep, decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, and rash. Risks are associated with all vaccines, including Prevenar. Hypersensitivity to any vaccine component, including diphtheria toxoid, is a contraindication to its use. Prevenar does not provide 100% protection against vaccine serotypes or protect against non-vaccine serotypes.