

A vaccine against the leading cause of pneumonia is protecting millions more children in developing countries, according to figures compiled to mark the fourth World Pneumonia Day. By the end of 2012, the vaccine will have reached an estimated 13 million children in the world's poorest countries.

To date, 21 countries have already introduced the pneumococcal vaccine in record time, with support from the GAVI Alliance. By 2015, more than 50 countries plan to introduce the vaccine, protecting millions more children from one of the leading causes of pneumonia.

“Pneumonia is a terrible disease that claims the lives of hundreds of thousands of children every year,” said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of the GAVI Alliance, “We have the tools to change this. GAVI is taking the lead in ensuring that countries that want to vaccinate their children against pneumococcal disease, one of the leading causes of pneumonia, are supported to do so.”

GAVI has also supported the introduction of a vaccine that protects against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), which is another leading cause of pneumonia.

Almost all of the 73 countries GAVI works in have introduced the vaccine, reaching 120 million children. By the end of 2012, it is projected that over 600,000 future deaths caused by Hib disease will have been prevented through GAVI Alliance support.

World Pneumonia Day aims to raise awareness about the toll pneumonia takes on the world's children and to promote interventions to protect against, treat, and prevent the disease.

On the first World Pneumonia Day in 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), together with GAVI and partners, launched the Global Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Pneumonia (GAPP). This plan focuses on

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increasing access to vaccines, improving nutrition (through measures such as exclusive breastfeeding), reducing exposure to indoor air pollution, and increasing access to antimicrobial drugs that can treat pneumonia.

For more than 30 years, immunisation has played an important role in pneumonia prevention. Vaccines against the two leading bacterial causes of child pneumonia deaths, Hib and *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcus) can improve child survival.

Both Hib and pneumococcal conjugate vaccines have been proven safe and effective and are recommended by the WHO for inclusion in national programmes. Measles can also lead to pneumonia, and GAVI is stepping up its support for this vaccine.

The Advance Market Commitment (AMC) was established to accelerate the introduction of pneumococcal vaccine into the poorest countries. In the past, it has taken 10-20 years for new vaccines to be introduced in poor countries. Thanks to the AMC and its donors, this process has been accelerated for the pneumococcal vaccine.

In December 2010, Nicaragua became the first GAVI-eligible country to introduce pneumococcal vaccine into its routine immunisation programme, less than a year after it was introduced in countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

Since then, other countries have introduced the life-saving vaccine, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Yemen and, most recently, Madagascar. GAVI and its partners, including UNICEF and the WHO, are planning to support countries to immunise 90 million children with pneumococcal vaccines by 2015.

“GAVI led the way in ensuring that children in the world’s poorest countries could access Hib vaccines. It was immediately placed at the top of our vaccine support strategy when we were

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formed and it continues to protect the lives of children across the world,” Dr Berkley added.

“Maximising routine immunisation with pertussis and measles vaccines, coupled with provision of a second opportunity for measles immunisation, are also important interventions to rapidly reduce childhood deaths from pneumonia in low-income countries.”

The Global Coalition Against Child Pneumonia, established in 2009, is comprised of over 140 non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, academic institutions, government agencies, and foundations. The Coalition provides leadership for World Pneumonia Day, marked every year on 12 November.