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Brazil to export vaccine against measles, rubella

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Brazil will produce a combined vaccine against measles and rubella exclusively for export to poor countries, mainly in Africa, its health minister said Monday.

Alexandre Padilha said the aim was to produce 30 million doses by 2017 for sale at a price of 54 US cents each. Currently such vaccines are made only in India.

Padilha made the announcement at an event in Rio where he announced that the government was inking an investment deal with the US Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to develop the vaccine.

He said his ministry would invest $727 million in construction of a state-of-the pharmaceutical plant at the Bio-Manguinhos Institute, a government institution located in Rio.

"This plant will generate employment, revenue, know-how, research and technological innovation in this country," he added.

"The agreement which we are signing provides more investments and buying guarantees, which makes it possible to export at the lowest cost," he said.

The Gates Foundation is meanwhile allocating $1.1 million for the project.

Measles was eradicated in Brazil in 2000 and rubella (or German measles) in 2009.

But the diseases remain endemic in some countries.

In 2011, 158,000 people died of measles around the world, most of them in poor countries, according to data from the World Health Organization.

Meanwhile Carlos Gadelha, the health ministry's science and technology secretary said Latin America's dominant economic power also hopes to make headway toward developing the pentavalent vaccine and a vaccine against dengue fever.

The pentavalent vaccine simultaneously provides protection against five life threatening diseases - Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Hepatitis B and Hib (Haemophilus influenza type b).

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