

Gabon research centre says antimalarial drug within reach

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A scientist at the Albert Schweitzer Hospital's medical research unit said Wednesday that trials of a new antimalarial drug were encouraging and paved the way for licensing.

"These preliminary results are relatively encouraging and lead us to believe... that we could have something licensed," Dr Jose Fernandez said in Libreville at an event marking World Malaria Day.

He said the drug had been in the final of three clinical trial phases for the past two years at the research centre in Lambarene, the Gabon jungle town where [Nobel Peace Prize](#) winner Schweitzer founded the hospital 99 years ago.

The RTS,S/AS01E vaccine is manufactured by British pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline and the research -- which is led by the University of Tübingen -- is being financed by the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#).

Fernandez said the vaccine had achieved 56 percent protection from malaria and 46 percent against severe malaria.

While global campaigning and wide distributions of [mosquito nets](#) have helped curb malaria, it is still regarded as the worst parasitic disease in the world.

The [World Health Organisation](#) says 655,000 people died of malaria in

2010, making the mosquito-borne disease the world's fifth biggest killer in low-income countries.

Speaking at the same event in Libreville, Gabonese Health Minister Leon Nzouba described malaria as his country's top public health problem.

Schweitzer, who was born a German and later became French, was also a respected philosopher, organist, musicologist and theologian. He died in the hospital he founded in 1965 at the age of 90.

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