

Britain and Bill Gates announce £3 billion to eradicate malaria (Update)

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Credit: CDC

Britain's finance minister and tech billionaire Bill Gates unveiled Monday a plan to spend billions to eradicate "the world's deadliest killer" malaria.

Chancellor George Osborne and Gates announced a £3 billion (\$4.28 billion, 4 billion euros) fund for research and to support efforts to

eliminate the mosquito-borne disease.

"Malaria is a huge killer out there but with effort and the kind of research that happens here in the north of England we can actually, I think, eliminate this disease," Osborne said at an event at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.

"We are committing this money... to bring an end to this disease that causes such heartbreak to so many families in the world but also a disease which damages the economies of so many countries."

The fund will include £500 million a year from Britain's overseas aid budget for the next five years, with the rest of the money coming from The Gates Foundation and more donations to follow.

Britain's contribution is around the same budget that had previously been devoted to fighting malaria, British newspaper reports said.

The announcement of the Ross Fund—named after Ronald Ross, a British doctor who won the Nobel Prize for his work on malaria—ups a previous pledge in November by Britain to spend £1 billion on fighting malaria and other infectious diseases.

There were 438,000 malaria deaths in 2015, most of them children aged under five, and the majority of them in Africa, according to the World Health Organization.

Efforts to control the disease have made significant progress in the last 15 years, but are threatened by the spread of resistance to antimalarial drugs and to insecticide, the WHO said in its World Malaria Report 2015.

"The biggest project that our foundation supports in Liverpool is coming

up with new chemicals to go into those bed nets that mosquitoes are not resistant to," Gates said.

"It's hard to overstate just how impactful malaria is. You simply can't really build a prosperous economy when you have lots of malaria."

Vaccine trials

Microsoft co-founder Gates has turned his attention from software to fighting disease and other ills around the world with his wife, under the auspices of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The charity has disbursed more than \$28 billion and provided funding for the world's most clinically advanced malaria vaccine, Mosquirix developed by GlaxoSmithKline.

Mosquirix, or RTS,S, is the first malaria vaccine to reach Phase III clinical testing—the final stage before market approval—and the first to be assessed by regulators. It received a nod from European regulators in July.

A WHO expert panel in October recommended pilot roll-outs of the vaccine to young children in several areas of sub-Saharan Africa, before considering wider use.

The WHO is expected to follow the panel's recommendations, which could result in Mosquirix becoming the first licensed vaccine against a parasitic disease. But a decision still lies a way off.

In April last year, the results of a years-long trial with 15,500 children in seven African countries were published in *The Lancet* medical journal—announcing mixed success.

Only around a third of the children who received the vaccine were protected for the full duration of the trial, researchers found.

But even so, the vaccine has the potential to prevent millions of cases and could save thousands of lives.

The new announcement comes days after the philanthropist Gates revealed plans for a \$100 million scheme to cut malnutrition in Nigeria.

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