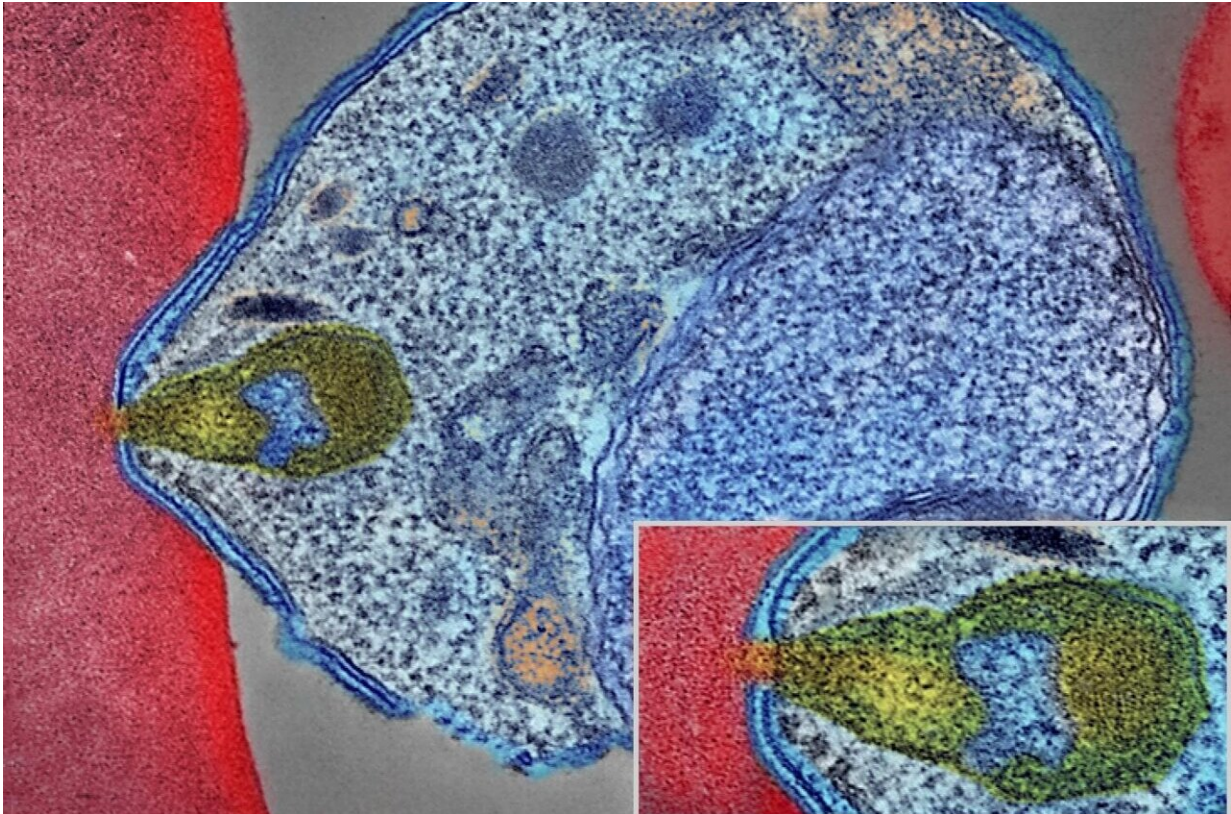


Benin gets first malaria vaccines

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Colorized electron micrograph showing malaria parasite (right, blue) attaching to a human red blood cell. The inset shows a detail of the attachment point at higher magnification. Credit: NIAID

Benin has received its first doses of a vaccine for malaria, the leading cause of infant mortality in the country, and will begin administering them soon, officials said late on Monday.

"Malaria remains endemic and represents the leading cause of death among children under five years of age in Benin," Health Minister Benjamin Hounkpatin told reporters at Cotonou airport, where the government received 215,900 doses of the RTS,S vaccine.

The first vaccinations will take place "within a few months", he said.

In Benin, 40 percent of outpatient consultations and 25 percent of hospital admissions are linked to malaria, according to the minister.

The vaccine will immunize "thousands of children" under the age of two, Benin Faustin Yao, an immunization specialist at the UNICEF office in Benin, told AFP.

He said infants would receive four doses, at the age of six months, seven months, nine months and 18 months.

Benin is the third African country to receive doses of the vaccine after Cameroon and Sierra Leone, following a pilot phase in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi coordinated by the World Health Organization and funded by the GAVI Vaccine Alliance among others.

More than two million children have been vaccinated in these three African countries, leading to a "spectacular decline" in mortality and a significant drop in severe forms of malaria and hospitalizations, GAVI said.

According to the WHO, almost every minute, a child under the age of five dies from malaria.

Caused by a parasite transmitted by certain types of mosquitoes, the disease remains a formidable problem due in particular to its increasing resistance to treatment.

In 2021, 247 million cases were recorded across the world and 619,000 patients died, according to the WHO, which says the disease mainly affects Africa.

A colossal 95 percent of cases and 96 percent of deaths are on the continent.

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