

Whole communities in Africa could be protected from pneumococcus by immunising young children

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A study led by the Medical Research Council in The Gambia in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and published in this week's *PLoS Medicine* shows for the first time in Africa, that vaccinating young children against the pneumococcus (a bacterium that can cause fatal infections) causes a herd effect in which the entire community is protected against this infection.

In a randomised, controlled trial involving 21 villages in rural Gambia, the authors showed that vaccination of young children reduced carriage of [vaccine](#) serotype pneumococci (the type of pneumococcus contained in the vaccine) not only in the vaccinated children but also in vaccinated and non-vaccinated older children and adults. Furthermore, the study showed that vaccinating whole communities did not result in a community wide increase in carriage of nonvaccine serotype pneumococci (other types of pneumococci that are not included in the vaccine) in the two-year period after vaccination.

As an alternative method to long-term observational studies and to anticipate the potential long term effects of the introduction of pneumococcal conjugate vaccination in sub-Saharan Africa, the authors conducted a village-randomized trial in The Gambia in which the whole population of some villages were immunized with pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV-7) (vaccinated villages) and in other villages only children

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