

New vaccine trials show promise in fight against meningitis

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A woman carries her sick child to the health center of Lazaret, near Niamey, where are treated patients suffering from meningitis. Results show immune response from one dose of NmCV-5 was notably higher than the licensed vaccine [File: Boureima Hama/AFP]

Niamey, June 21 (RHC)-- A new meningitis vaccine tested in two African countries has shown promise in the fight against the disease, eliciting immune responses against five main strains. According to a recent

study published by the New England Journal of Medicine, the phase-three randomised trials were conducted on 1,800 people in the West African nations of Mali and The Gambia.

The under-trial NmCV-5 vaccine, developed by the health organisation PATH and India's Serum Institute, was tested and compared with the WHO-approved and licensed MenACWY-D vaccine in participants in three age groups between two and 29 years old.

The results showed immune response from one dose of the NmCV-5 was notably higher than the licensed vaccine. According to the authors, no major safety concerns were found during the trial. The study's co-author, Ed Clarke, said researchers were "excited" about the findings of the research.

"We expect NmCV-5 to provide children and young adults with reliable protection against meningitis ... The new vaccine will be a critical tool to interrupting and preventing devastating epidemics of meningitis in the meningitis belt," Clarke said in a statement.

Meningitis is the inflammation of the protective membranes and tissues that cover the spinal cord and brain, and is caused by various species of bacteria, fungi, parasites and viruses. Symptoms of the disease include nausea, vomiting, fever and neck pain. About 250,000 people are estimated to die each year from meningitis.

"Epidemic preparedness is the way forward in providing available, affordable and accessible vaccines relevant to regions prone to meningitis outbreaks. Having meningitis vaccines should be a public health priority to prevent catastrophic outcomes during an outbreak and would be a game changer in the fight against meningitis," said study co-author Ama Umesi.

Bacterial meningitis is the most common form of the disease and can be fatal within 24 hours, according to the WHO, and cannot be treated at home. While it is found across the world, some of the highest numbers of cases are found in sub-Saharan Africa.

A road map by WHO, called Defeating Meningitis by 2030, aims to eliminate bacterial meningitis epidemics by 2030, a reduction of "vaccine-preventable bacterial meningitis" by 50 percent, and deaths by 70 percent.

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