

A Paradigm for International Cooperation: The GAVI Alliance

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INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, scientists and public health leaders have known that preventing infectious diseases is the most efficient form of health intervention. During the 20th century, medical research led to the development of vaccines that prevent a number of crippling, often fatal, childhood diseases. In fact, vaccines helped to reduce the health gap between rich and poor countries. Up until the 1970s, outside of the world's richest countries most children did not get vaccinated against even a single disease. Following the successful eradication of smallpox in 1977, public health advocates and experts around the world collaborated to help build systems in developing countries to routinely provide infants with vaccination against six diseases—measles, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, poliomyelitis, and tuberculosis (using bacille Calmette-Guérin vaccine). By 1990, 75% of the world's children received these “basic six” vaccines. In the history of international public health, there has been no other routine health intervention that has received such high coverage as infant vaccination.

However, as a new century begins, the world falls short of realizing the full benefit of childhood immunization. By the end of the 1990s, approximately 34 million children were born every year that would not become immunized. In sub-Saharan Africa fewer than half of the children were being immunized. As a result, every year, approximately three million additional lives could be saved from easily prevented infectious diseases if vaccines could reach their target populations.

Moreover, vaccines such as those against hepatitis B and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) have not been introduced quickly enough in the poorest countries. New vaccines at late stages of development, such as those being created against pneumococcal pneumonia, meningococcal meningitis, and rotavirus diarrhea—diseases that kill millions of children every year in the developing world—are at risk of not reaching those who need them most. Finally, the search for vaccines against several of the most critical infectious disease threats of our time—HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis—must be intensified, and effective health delivery systems must be strengthened to ensure that once these vaccines are successfully developed, all those in need can access them.

GAVI COMES ON THE SCENE

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) was launched in 2000 as a coalition committed to reinvigorating and sustaining the promise of widespread immunization

(Box 1). A partnership that includes national governments, UNICEF, WHO, The World Bank Group, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the vaccine industry, and research and technical health institutions, GAVI exists as a mechanism for coordinating and revitalizing immunization programs at international, regional, and national levels.

GAVI Alliance mission statement:

To save children's lives and protect people's health by increasing access to immunization in poor countries.

GAVI Alliance strategic goals:

1. Contribute to strengthening the capacity of the health system to deliver immunization and other health services in a sustainable manner.
2. Accelerate the uptake and use of underused and new vaccines and associated technologies and improve vaccine supply security.
3. Increase the predictability and sustainability of long-term financing for national immunization programs.
4. Increase and assess the added value of GAVI as a public-private global health partnership through improved efficiency, increased advocacy, and continued innovation.

Developing country governments have provided childhood immunizations as part of their health services for decades. In most cases the Alliance taps into existing capabilities and networks—including the staff and technical resources of partners—so there is no need to build brand new systems. WHO and other technical partners have been providing governments technical support to shape country programs and monitor results, and they continue to do so; UNICEF purchases most vaccines used by the poorest countries and it procures on behalf of GAVI. Finally, in-country collaboration teams had been set up in many countries for polio eradication; these are now used for GAVI-related issues.

By significantly expanding the reach and effectiveness of immunization programs, country by country, the GAVI partners hope to decrease the burden of disease globally. GAVI reaffirms that immunization is a cornerstone for health, a key component of the broader framework of economic development and poverty reduction, and an essential step to protecting