



EARTH ACTION

*A Global Network for the Environment, Peace and Social Justice*BACKGROUND  
INFORMATION

# The World Needs an AIDS Vaccine

## AIDS is the Great Plague of our modern era.

Already more than 60 million men, women and children worldwide have been infected with HIV. More than 20 million of them have died. Fully 95% of new HIV infections occur in developing countries, where AIDS is undermining economic stability, reversing decades of progress and devastating families and communities.

AIDS demands a comprehensive global response that includes greater support for prevention, care and treatment programs for all who need them, regardless of where they live or ability to pay. As part of this strategy, the world must accelerate the development of preventive vaccines for AIDS and assure that these vaccines, once available, are distributed worldwide. A preventive vaccine offers the best hope of ending AIDS. The world has eradicated smallpox and has almost eliminated polio with vaccines. Human trials of promising AIDS vaccine candidates are underway; however, no AIDS vaccine is yet available. With 15,000 new HIV infections daily, there is no time to delay.

## Today there is Progress...

To be sure, the past two years have witnessed remarkable advancements in AIDS research. Thanks to growing awareness that a preventive vaccine is the only way to end the epidemic, today AIDS vaccines are on the international scientific and political agendas. Global funding for vaccine research has quadrupled since 1996, and multiple promising candidates are in development worldwide.

Notably, the US government and the European Union have stepped up their support for AIDS vaccine research, including targeted product development to complement traditional basic research. Several major pharmaceutical companies now have AIDS vaccine research and development projects, with Merck & Co. testing two vaccines in first-stage

human trials and GlaxoSmithKline expected to follow suit by the end of the year. Preliminary results from VaxGen's final-stage phase III trial AIDSVAX, underway in North America and Europe, are expected later this year.

In March, a trial of the first AIDS vaccine made for Africa began in Nairobi, Kenya. The product of a partnership among the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), the UK's Medical Research Council and the University of Nairobi, this vaccine candidate is based on subtype A, the most common strain of HIV circulating in Eastern Africa. Within the next two years, IAVI expects to begin human trials of more vaccines tailored to the strains of HIV predominant in Africa and Asia.

## ...But Much More Needs to Be Done

Yet despite recent good news, the world's commitment to AIDS vaccines still is inadequate, given both the scope of the epidemic and what could be done. The world must ensure that the promising AIDS vaccine candidates now in development are moved forward as quickly as possible. Good ideas must not be abandoned for want of funding or interest. Speed is of the essence.

None of the candidate vaccines now in development is a sure bet, and the potential for failure is fully admitted by the vaccine makers themselves. So even as governments, private foundations and industry are investing in high-profile vaccine projects, we must continue to fill the research pipeline with new vaccines and swiftly submit those that are promising to human testing. Vaccine science is a trial-and-error process. It is possible that a safe and effective vaccine will emerge from among those now being tested, but the stakes are too high to pin the world's hopes on only these approaches.

Indeed, there are thousands of possibilities for the design of an AIDS vaccine, yet only a handful have



been tried. In *Scientific Blueprint 2000: Accelerating Global Efforts in AIDS Vaccine Development*, IAVI calls for the world to develop 25 new vaccines, utilizing novel approaches, and see the best six to eight of these through large-scale efficacy trials by 2007. Because it takes nearly a decade to move a vaccine from concept to final-stage human testing, it is critical that multiple products be developed simultaneously and tested in parallel. This way, when one vaccine proves ineffective, work on alternatives already is underway.

In the end, it may require multiple AIDS vaccines to provide worldwide coverage, given that HIV changes form rapidly and different strains are circulating.

### **The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative**

IAVI was created in 1996 to speed the development and distribution of preventive AIDS vaccines. The organization's work focuses on four areas: mobilizing support through advocacy and education; accelerating scientific progress; encouraging industrial participation in AIDS vaccine development; and assuring global access for a vaccine once it is developed.

### **Accelerating Scientific Development**

The cornerstone of IAVI's scientific program is its Vaccine Development Partnerships (VDP's). IAVI has invested almost US\$ 20 million in five innovative Vaccine Development Partnerships, which are designed to move promising vaccine candidates towards clinical testing. Currently IAVI has five partnerships working in Kenya, South Africa, India and Uganda. Clinical trials are already underway in the UK and Kenya.

### **Providing Access**

Getting the science right is just part of the challenge. Once vaccines are available, they will need to be rapidly distributed worldwide. Unfortunately, this is not the way most other lifesaving vaccines have been introduced, with developing countries waiting 15 years or more after the industrialized world. IAVI believes it is possible and morally imperative to provide widespread access to an AIDS vaccine. "Trickle-down vaccination" is deplorable for any disease, but especially so for AIDS.

Assuring access to a vaccine means finding ways now to finance the purchase and distribution of an AIDS vaccine so that it is available to even the poorest nations. In some countries, the price of a single dose of an AIDS vaccine is likely to exceed per capita spending on all health care services combined. In addition, assuring access means scaling up manufacturing capacity and formalizing networks for distributing a vaccine to the populations who will receive it. In the case of at-risk populations such as commercial sex workers and truck drivers, little to no delivery infrastructure is currently in place. The key is to make plans and secure commitments now, so we are ready when a vaccine is.

### **About IAVI**

IAVI, a tax-exempt organization, put AIDS vaccines onto the global policy agenda, and won significant increases in government funding for AIDS vaccine research and development. It draws its support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Sloan Foundation and the Starr Foundation; the governments of the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, Canada and Ireland; the World Bank; and other generous foundations, corporations, and individuals throughout the world. IAVI's Scientific Advisory Committee is made up of leading scientists from nine nations. In 1998, IAVI was named a collaborating centre of UNAIDS.

Lean in structure and catalytic in nature, IAVI operates through a secretariat in New York, with representation in Europe and Africa. For more information, visit [www.iavi.org](http://www.iavi.org).

### **What You Can Do?**

You can sign the Global Call for Action that urges all of the world's leaders to take concrete action now to ensure the development of safe, effective and accessible preventative AIDS vaccines for use wherever they are needed. Sign the enclosed copy or visit their website at <http://www.iavi.org/callforaction>.

For more information contact:

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Or, contact any EarthAction office listed below.

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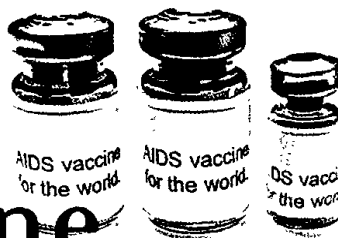
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# Tell our **leaders** the world needs an **AIDS vaccine**



AIDS is the Great Plague of our modern era. Already the epidemic has claimed the lives of more than 20 million men, women and children worldwide. Fully 95% of new HIV infections are in developing countries, where AIDS is undermining economic stability, reversing decades of progress and devastating families and communities.

Amid global tragedy, a preventive vaccine for AIDS offers the best hope of ending the pandemic. The world has eradicated smallpox and has almost eliminated polio with vaccines. Human trials of promising AIDS vaccine candidates are underway; however, no AIDS vaccine is yet available. With 15,000 new HIV infections daily, there is no time to delay.

**We, the undersigned, urge all of the world's leaders to take concrete action now to ensure the development of safe, effective and accessible preventive AIDS vaccines for use wherever they are needed.**

We call for significant new resources to be devoted worldwide to AIDS vaccine research and development. In particular, new resources are needed for development of vaccines that will be applicable for developing countries. These funds must not be diverted from therapeutics or other prevention efforts.

We call for governments to commit the necessary resources to provide AIDS vaccines, when they are available, to all who need them without delay. This includes securing binding commitments for financing the purchase and delivery of vaccines for poor countries. Such a clear, unambiguous commitment must be made at the United Nations

General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS and other international meetings.

We call for further involvement of industry in AIDS vaccine development, as most vaccine-making expertise and capacity reside there. The world's leaders must find innovative ways to assure global access to AIDS vaccines while allowing a reasonable return for industry's investments.

We call for support of human trials of vaccines, and we salute trial volunteers, the *unsung heroes* of vaccine development. Human testing is critical to determining whether a vaccine is effective. Therefore, the world must prioritize efficacy trials of the most promising vaccines. Many selfless men and women have already volunteered, and many more must follow their brave leadership.

We call for vaccine research and development to be part of a comprehensive strategy to fight the epidemic. The world must redouble its commitment to existing prevention programs, including education. And all who are sick with AIDS deserve the best treatment possible, regardless of where they live or ability to pay.

We call on the public sector of all nations to work with private industry, international agencies and nongovernmental organizations to end the epidemic. No single country, company, organization, community or individual has the resources to go it alone. But each has a unique and essential contribution to make.

Twenty years into the epidemic, AIDS remains a global emergency that demands an effective response. A preventive vaccine is the best hope to end AIDS for all time.

**Sign now at [www.iavi.org/callforaction](http://www.iavi.org/callforaction)**

Name

City and country

Organization and title

State or province if applicable

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