WHO News

New low-cost meningitis vaccine developed in record time

A new meningitis vaccine has been made available to WHO at a cost of one euro per dose. WHO is now issuing an urgent appeal to buy millions of doses of the vaccine before the meningitis season strikes.

The vaccine could represent significant progress in the battle against the disease which suffered a setback last year with the emergence of the strain W135. The strain exploded in Burkina Faso, striking more than 13 000 and killing at least 1500. Until now, there was no affordable vaccine available to combat it. Funds are now urgently needed to get production of the vaccine underway before the next wave of the disease sweeps across Africa’s “meningitis belt,” which stretches from Ethiopia to Senegal and is home to 350 million people.

“This is an urgent health situation which forces quick action,” said Dr Anarfi Asamoa-Baah, Assistant Director-General in charge of Communicable Diseases at WHO.

Every year, meningitis sweeps across sub-Saharan Africa, sometimes igniting outbreaks involving 100 000 people or more. At least 10% of those infected die and many others are left permanently disabled. Now, at least, the newest and most threatening form of the disease can be slowed significantly, providing funds are found. “The tragedy of meningitis will be compounded if we can get this new vaccine to those who need it most,” said Dr Asamoa-Baah.