

New Initiative to Tackle Leading Killer of Children

18 February, 2009: Baltimore, USA – Pneumonia kills more children than any other illness, yet few global initiatives are tackling the disease. Scaling up proven and available interventions, like pneumococcal vaccines and antibiotic treatments, could prevent many pneumonia deaths. However, scientists are stymied in their efforts to develop new ways to prevent the remaining deaths by an incomplete understanding of the causes of pneumonia—in up to one third of children with pneumonia, research fails to find the cause of disease. To help overcome this information gap, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH) recently received three grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for more than \$43 million over the next five and a half years.

The core initiative, called PERCH (Pneumonia Etiology Research for Child Health), aims to build a new, rigorous evidence base by studying the causes of pediatric pneumonia in 5 to 10 countries across the developing world using state-of-the-art diagnostics.

“Our current information on pneumonia etiology is about to become obsolete,” said Dr. Orin Levine, Associate Professor of International Health, and principal investigator of the project. “Most existing information was generated 10 to 20 years ago with laboratory techniques that hadn’t changed vastly since Louis Pasteur’s time. By applying modern tools with standardized methods, we will be able to provide new, precise information to guide the development of new vaccines and treatments.”

Two additional studies will strengthen the initiative’s fight against pneumonia and related diseases. Dr. Hope Johnson will project the burden of disease in adolescents and adults attributable to two dangerous bacteria—the pneumococcus and the meningococcus—that together cause many cases of pneumonia and other life-threatening illnesses such as meningitis. Dr. Jennifer Moïsi will undertake an evaluation of diagnostic methods for pneumococcal disease, a major cause of childhood pneumonia, particularly in the developing world. Together these projects will influence the development and deployment of life-saving vaccines throughout the world.

The pneumonia initiative, based at Hopkins’ Department of International Health, follows on the heels of the successful PneumoADIP project at JHSPH, which accelerated access to childhood pneumococcal vaccines for the developing world by nearly 10 years. Through the new initiative, the JHSPH group continues to advance protection for all children against pneumonia.

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For more information, please visit www.preventpneumo.org and www.jhsph.edu

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