

## How Gavi support for RSV immunisation will advance health equity

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) causes severe illness in millions of young children each year.<sup>1</sup> Globally, it is estimated that over 100 000 children younger than 5 years die each year from RSV; 97% of these deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>2</sup> Approximately 45% of RSV-associated deaths occur in infants younger than 6 months.<sup>2</sup> Mortality, as well as severe morbidity, could be prevented through maternal vaccination or through passive immunisation of infants after birth. Preventing RSV disease could also reduce the risk of superimposed bacterial pneumonia.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is an international partnership created to improve access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries. In supplying lifesaving vaccines to more than 1 billion children, it is estimated that Gavi support has prevented more than 17 million deaths.<sup>3,4</sup>

By supporting RSV prevention strategies, Gavi could save many more lives. In 2018, the Gavi board identified RSV as a key priority for further expansion of the Gavi portfolio of vaccines, voicing support of products to protect infants including maternal vaccines and long-acting monoclonal antibodies.<sup>5</sup> This decision was contingent upon the availability of a licensed product, WHO prequalification, WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) recommendation, meeting the financial assumptions from the initial investment case presented, and the availability of funds.<sup>6</sup> Since that time, two highly effective products, the RSVpreF maternal vaccine and the RSV monoclonal antibody nirsevimab, have been licensed and implemented in many high-income and upper-middle-income countries, with other

products in late-stage development.<sup>7</sup> In 2024, SAGE recommended that "all countries introduce products for the prevention of severe RSV disease in infants".<sup>6</sup>

The RSVpreF vaccine single dose vial for maternal vaccination has recently been WHO prequalified, with prequalification of the multidose vial anticipated in 2026, a necessary prerequisite for affordability in LMICs.<sup>8</sup> RSV immunisation has been successfully introduced in high-income countries, resulting in major public health impact.<sup>9,10</sup> Because political shifts in high-income countries have put pressure on the financial support for global immunisation programmes in countries with the highest mortality rates, and on the Gavi budget, the implementation of RSV immunisation could remain delayed and roll-out in LMICs could stall. Although recognising the substantial budget challenges facing the Gavi board, we reiterate the value of prioritising support for the RSV interventions that meet the criteria of the Gavi investment case.

As with the other diseases within the Gavi strategy, Africa and south Asia bear the highest burden of RSV disease, yet currently have no access to RSV immunisation through public health systems. Addressing this gap will advance Gavi's commitment to equity. The tools are available. Investment in RSV prevention will help reduce premature mortality and achieve Sustainable Development Goal target 3.2: ending preventable deaths of newborns and children younger than five by 2030. An RSV programme would also align with the goals of WHO, UNICEF, and other global agencies to strengthen maternal and child health and reduce hospitalisation and deaths from respiratory diseases, the leading cause of mortality for children younger than 5 years worldwide. Preventing RSV disease during infancy will also free up health system capacity to treat other diseases.

As part of its mission to save lives and protect people's health by increasing equitable and sustainable use of vaccines, we call on Gavi's leadership to ensure equitable access to RSV prevention for all children—no matter where they are born.

This Correspondence has been endorsed by 44 leading scientific and societal organisations worldwide (appendix pp 1–2). LJB has regular interaction with pharmaceutical and other industrial partners, but has not received personal fees or other personal benefits; and is a board member of three non-profit foundations (ReSVINET, INFECT-NL, and Vrienden UMC Utrecht). LJB also reports that University Medical Centre Utrecht has received major funding (>€100 000 per industrial partner) for investigator initiated studies from AstraZeneca, Sanofi, Janssen, Pfizer, Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD), and MeMed Diagnostics; has received major funding from The Gates Foundation; has received major funding as part of the public–private partnership IMI-funded RESCEU and PROMISE projects with partners GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), Novavax, Janssen, AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Sanofi; has received major funding from Julius Clinical for participating in clinical studies sponsored by AstraZeneca, Merck, and Pfizer; and has received minor funding (€1000–25 000 per industrial partner) for consultation, data safety monitoring board membership, or invited lectures from Ablynx, Bavaria Nordic, GSK, Novavax, Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, MSD, Sanofi, and Janssen. CP reports grants from the Gates Foundation; and participation on a data safety monitoring board or advisory board for WHO and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. FM-T reports grants or contracts from Sanofi–AstraZeneca, GSK, and Pfizer; consulting fees from GSK, Pfizer, Sanofi Pasteur, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, MSD, CSL Seqirus, Biofabri, and AstraZeneca; support for attending meetings or travel from Pfizer, MSD, GSK, and Sanofi; is a member of ETAGE – WHO Europe, coordinator of the Spanish Pediatric Critical Trials Network, and coordinator of WHO Collaborating Centre for Vaccine Safety of Santiago de Compostela; and is Principal investigator in randomised controlled trials of Ablynx, Abbot, Seqirus, Sanofi Pasteur MSD, Sanofi Pasteur, Cubist, Wyeth, Merck, Pfizer, Roche, Regeneron, Jansen, Medimmune, Novavax, Novartis, and GSK, with honoraria paid to his institution. HJZ reports grants or contracts from Pfizer, MSD, and Sanofi; payment or honoraria for lectures, presentations, speakers bureaus, manuscript writing, or educational events from Pfizer; participation on a data safety monitoring board or advisory board for Moderna and Sanofi; and was past chair for the WHO Technical Advisory Group on new RSV preventive interventions. MJG reports grants and support for attending meetings from the Gates Foundation. SAM reports grants or contracts from the Gates Foundation, GSK, Pfizer, Minervax, Merck, Providence, and Gritstone; honoraria for lectures from GSK; and participation on a data safety monitoring board or advisory board from PATH, CAPRISA, and Bavarian Nordic. All other authors declare no competing interests.



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## Global immunisation monitoring in times of drastic cutbacks

Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases are increasing at a time when funding for immunisation programmes is being cut.<sup>1</sup> The full impact of the cutbacks might remain hidden, as long-established surveillance and monitoring systems to detect outbreaks and measure immunisation coverage are simultaneously being dismantled.

The funding cuts to countries, UN agencies, and others not only threaten the provision of life-saving vaccines for millions of people, but also long-standing and trusted systems for vaccine-preventable disease surveillance and immunisation coverage monitoring. Disease surveillance and monitoring systems are crucial to the success of any immunisation programme.

In many countries, disruptions are already affecting key information systems, including collaborative surveillance and emergency systems, health management information systems, disease-specific reporting

systems, laboratory information systems, and household and population surveys.<sup>2</sup> For example, the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) programme, funded by the US Agency for International Development, has been paused after more than 40 years of operation. The DHS programme enabled over 400 household surveys across 90 countries, providing crucial data on childhood immunisation coverage and other health indicators. Similarly, the Global Measles and Rubella Laboratory Network,<sup>3</sup> which includes more than 700 laboratories in over 160 countries, faces existential funding problems at a time when measles cases, in some regions, are at their highest in over 25 years.<sup>4</sup> The disruptions to this network will jeopardise progress towards measles elimination worldwide.

Action in three key areas could prevent loss of progress made in immunisation. First, governments could enhance domestic investment in immunisation and surveillance infrastructure. Second, urgent efforts are needed to identify and mobilise diverse and sustainable financing of national monitoring systems—aligned with the International Health Regulations and WHO Pandemic Agreement (2025)—to reduce dependence on external donors. Third, member states should continue to empower global institutions, such as WHO and UNICEF, to coordinate and support surveillance and monitoring systems.

Routine immunisation has saved more than 154 million lives over the past five decades.<sup>5</sup> Safeguarding the hard-won progress in immunisation requires sustainable funding not only for vaccines, but also for surveillance and monitoring. Only with this funding can the goal of the Immunization Agenda 2030—a world where everyone, everywhere benefits from life-saving vaccines—be achieved.<sup>6</sup>

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