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Major step in malaria prevention as three West African countries roll out vaccine

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To further scale up vaccine deployment in the African region



In a significant step forward for malaria prevention in Africa, three countries- Benin, Liberia and Sierra Leone– have launched a large-scale rollout of the life-saving malaria vaccine targeting millions of children across the three West African nations. The vaccine rollout, announced on World Malaria Day on 25 April, seeks to further scale up vaccine deployment in the African region.

The launch brings to eight the number of countries on the continent to offer the malaria vaccine as part of the childhood immunisation programmes, extending access to more comprehensive malaria prevention.

Several of the more than 30 countries in the African region that have expressed interest in the vaccine are scheduled to roll it out in the next year through support from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, as efforts continue to widen its deployment in the region in coordination with other prevention measures such as long-lasting insecticidal nets and seasonal malaria chemoprevention.

Benin, which received 215,900 doses, has added the malaria vaccine to its Expanded Programme on Immunisation. The malaria vaccine should be provided in a schedule of 4 doses in children from around 5 months of age.

In Liberia, the vaccine was launched in the southern Rivercess County and will be rolled out afterwards in five other counties which have high malaria burden. At least 45,000 children are expected to benefit from the 112,000 doses of the available vaccine.

Two safe and effective vaccines, RTS,S and R21, recommended by World Health Organization (WHO), are a breakthrough for child health and malaria control. A pilot malaria vaccine programme in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi reached over 2 million children from 2019 to 2023, showing a significant reduction in malaria illness and a 13% drop in overall child mortality and substantial reductions in hospitalizations.

In Sierra Leone, the first doses were administered to children at a health centre in Western Area Rural where the authorities kicked off the rollout of 550,000 vaccine doses. The vaccine will then be delivered in health facilities nationwide.