Editorial

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An Ebola vaccine: first results and promising opportunities

Today, *The Lancet* publishes the first results from a phase 3 cluster randomised trial of a novel Ebola virus vaccine. The study, sponsored and led by WHO, is a remarkable scientific and logistical achievement. In the midst of an extreme public health emergency, researchers, health workers, and community facilitators in Guinea included 7651 people in a trial to test the efficacy of a recombinant, replication-competent vesicular stomatitis virus-based vaccine expressing a surface glycoprotein of Ebola (Zaire). The authors conclude that their interim analysis indicates the vaccine "might be highly efficacious and safe".

The technique used in the trial was "ring vaccination". This method involves identifying a newly diagnosed person with Ebola, and then tracking down their contacts and contacts of contacts. This procedure is not without its challenges (it was the same approach used to eradicate smallpox). To identify this often complex network of contacts required the help of family and friends in many small and dispersed communities across the most affected parts of the country. That such a trial was even possible is a testament not only to the skill of the research teams but also to the commitment of communities to defeating an epidemic that has devastated their nation. Over 90% of the study's staff

were from Guinea. Before this work, no clinical trial on this scale had ever been performed in the country.

This study will be the subject of intense scientific scrutiny and debate. But what do the results mean for those most at risk of Ebola virus infection in west Africa? The vaccine is not yet licensed. More data on efficacy are needed before it can be widely deployed. But if the evidence proves sufficient for licensing, a Global Ebola Vaccine Implementation Team, also under WHO's leadership, has been preparing the ground for its introduction—creating guidelines for the vaccine's use, strategies for community engagement, and mechanisms to expand country capacity for the vaccine's distribution and delivery. In addition, the GAVI Alliance has approved substantial funding for the procurement and deployment of the vaccine.

One important message goes beyond even Ebola the power of multilateralism and inclusive partnership to devise and execute critical clinical research. Ebola has been a catastrophe for west Africa. But out of this epidemic has come the opportunity to build unprecedented collaborations to generate evidence to advance health. There have been few better examples to prove the value and importance of WHO to strengthen global health security. ■ *The Lancet*



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