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# SII ships first set of malaria vaccine doses to Africa

Significant step in global fight against disease

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Eric Garcetti, US Ambassador to India with Adar and Natasha Poonawalla during the flag-off ceremony of the R21 malaria vaccine and Discussions around Indo-US collaborations and R21 malaria vaccine at Serum Institute of India on Monday. (Express photo by Arul Horizon)

Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest manufacturer of vaccines by number of doses, marked a significant milestone on Monday with the shipment of the first set of R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine to seven-eight countries in Africa.

Close to half-a-million children die of malaria each year in the African region, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The low-cost, high-efficacy **R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine** was developed by the University of Oxford and SII leveraging Novavax's adjuvant technology.

The vaccine has demonstrated high efficacy with a reassuring safety profile and the R21/Matrix-M vaccine is the second malaria vaccine to be authorised for use in children in malaria-endemic regions.

While SII has manufactured 25 million doses, Adar Poonawalla, CEO, SII, said they had a production capacity for 100 million doses per annum. Presently, of the total 1,63,800 doses allocated for the Central African Republic (CAR) region, on Monday, 43,200 doses were dispatched from SII facility. The initial shipment will be sent to CAR, followed by other African countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the coming days.

## WHO recommends Oxford vaccine against malaria



“This is a malaria vaccine for the African continent,” Poonawalla said. “It is not for India as the parasite is found in Africa. We are giving the vaccine at a very affordable price. This will be widely available and accessible to all the African countries and also the other lower-middle-income countries. Hence, we entered into a partnership with Novovax, University of Oxford and the United States government,” Poonawalla told mediapersons at the flagff ceremony. “SII fully funded phase 3 clinical trial,” he said.

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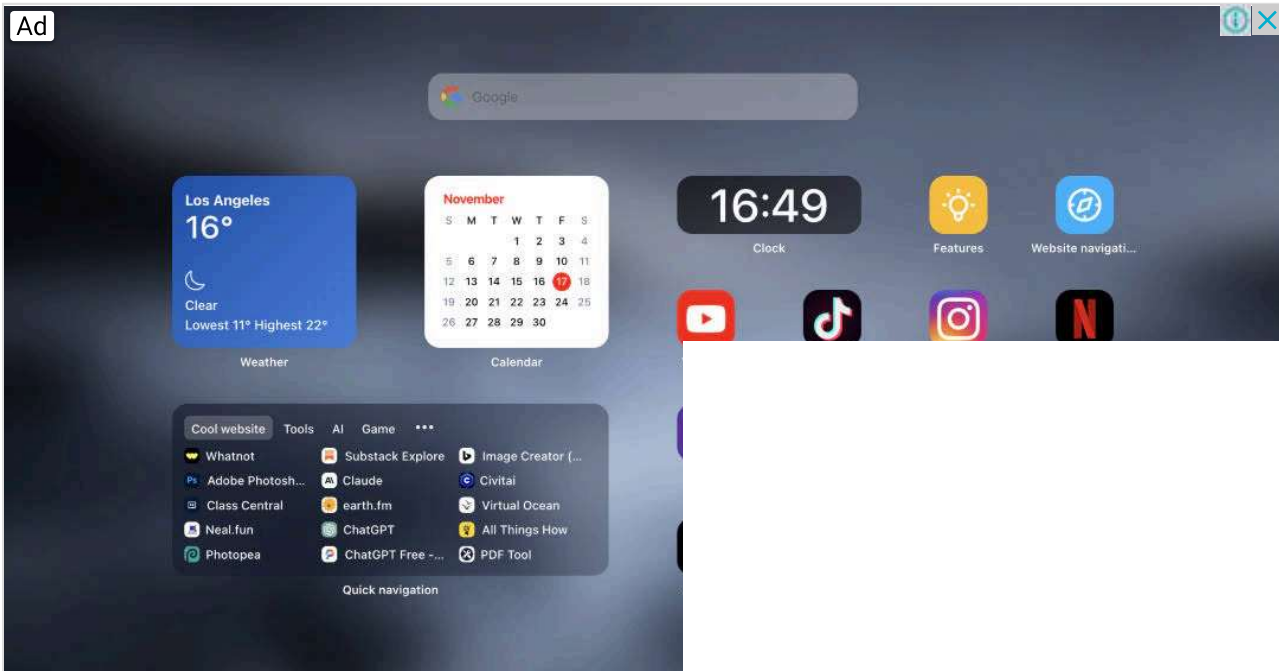
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On a vaccine for India, Poonawalla pointed out that the particular parasite (found in Africa) was not in India. “Hence for India, it will take another five years for a malaria vaccine,” Poonawalla said. He also spoke about efforts towards a dengue vaccine. “We are working towards a dengue vaccine, clinical trials are underway and after two-three years we can expect a dengue vaccine in India,” he said.

Earlier, Eric Garcetti, US Ambassador to India, while addressing the audience, said it was a history-changing day for children in Africa due to the generosity of the Poonawalla’s.

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“In Africa, a child dies every minute due to malaria. Hence, it is not a money-making, but a life-saving effort and shows the collective commitment of people here, who know that first and foremost we are human beings and need to save lives. It may seem easy now when we see the vaccine being loaded up and put on the plane little realising that each step of the way there could have been something that could have prevented this effort,” Garcetti said.



On a vaccine for India, Poonawalla pointed out that the particular parasite (found in Africa) was not in India. (Express File)

He also likened the SII ‘in some ways to a health pilgrimage site’. He also applauded SII’s role in vaccine manufacturing and said that this campus is unlike any place in the world with a mission to save lives.

“During our travels we visit great religious centres, temples, the Vatican and so on. This (SII) is in some ways a health pilgrimage site,” he said.

The US Ambassador also noted that work in the US was underway for a dengue fever vaccine, which had taken into account all four major strains and was in the third round of clinical trials.

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Silvia Taylor, Executive Vice President, Chief Corporate Affairs and Advocacy Officer, Novavax, said a malaria vaccine was a historic moment in the fight against malaria.

“We expect that this vaccine will not only reduce mortality in children but also dramatically shift the economic burden in a country facing the crisis,” Taylor said.

She also flagged concern about the need to build public trust in vaccines.

“When the [Covid-19](#) pandemic hit in 2020 we were able to develop a vaccine against Covid-19 that was approved and distributed all over the world. The vaccines ecosystem is unique and it takes dedication and collaboration and partnerships from across industry and academia. The Novovax and SII bond is a shining example of Indo-US partnership. However, there is more work to do in terms of build public trust in vaccines and in institutions that deliver them,” she said while hinting at the recent controversy related to Covid-19 vaccine causing blood clot-related side-effects.

Dr Umesh Shaligram, Executive Director, R&D, SII, also spoke on the occasion. Earlier, Dr Mehreen Dattoo, Associate Fellow, Clinical Lecturer in Infectious Diseases, Nuffield Department of Medicine, University of Oxford, and others were felicitated by Adar and Natasha Poonawalla.

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