

ADVERTISEMENT



  Menu

[Weekly edition](#) [The world in brief](#) [War in the Middle East](#) [War in Ukraine](#) [United States](#) [The world economy](#) [Business](#) [Art](#)

International | Immunisation and the market

New vaccines for old killers

Eradicating killer diseases is a financial challenge as well as a moral one

Feb 15th 2007 |

[Save](#) [Share](#) [Give](#)

IMAGINE how it is for a mother to watch her child die from a disease which the rich world successfully tackled half a century ago. That was the war-cry issued this month by Queen Rania of Jordan as part of an effort to marshal public and private funds for the fight against diseases that decimate youngsters in avoidable ways. Avoidable, that is, if human ingenuity was rationally used.

AFP



Say aaah and try this one

The GAVI alliance, of which the queen is a board member, is co-managing a scheme to shorten the time lag between the development of new vaccines and their use in places they are needed. Since poor nations lack the money to compensate drug firms for researching and refining vaccines, it takes 15 to 20 years for a new one to become available at prices affordable in the neediest places. Every year 3m people, half of them children, die of diseases that immunisation could prevent.

On February 9th an Italian-led initiative was launched in Rome to tackle the problem through financial engineering. Advance Market Commitments (AMCs) are guarantees, funded by rich nations, to subsidise future purchases in developing countries of a vaccine not yet produced.

ADVERTISEMENT

Some sceptics have questioned whether this “jerry-rigging” of markets can work. The project has undergone some tinkering and a change of name in an effort to silence the doubters. AMCs are more a sophisticated version of a concept that was known as the Advance Purchase Commitment when first mooted. Whether or not they have satisfied their critics, the project’s backers have induced the governments of Italy, Britain, Canada, Norway and Russia, plus the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to help fund a pilot scheme, at an eventual cost of about \$1.5 billion. The scheme aims to make available a suitable vaccine for pneumococcal

The Economist

times more likely to get pneumococcal diseases.

Some sceptics persist. The “pilot” effort, they note, is supposed to test a bold idea: that when donors know what they want to accomplish (a vaccine, say) but don’t know how to achieve it, they can promise in advance to pay anybody who gets the right result. But this test, sceptics say, is skewed: a general vaccine for pneumococcal disease exists—made by America’s Wyeth Pharmaceuticals—and the only challenge is to tackle some extra strains.

Yet purists may pipe down if the project achieves its aim, to vaccinate 70m to 100m children by 2020. There will be practical difficulties as well as theoretical ones: simple things like keeping vaccines cold in a hot country are a huge problem. Amid the figures cited in Rome, one stood out. It was Ghana’s per capita health budget, calculated by the World Bank at \$31 per year.

This article appeared in the International section of the print edition under the headline “New vaccines for old killers”

International
February 17th 2007

→ Not a cold war, but a cold tiff

→ **New vaccines for old killers**

→ Wakey-wakey



From the February 17th 2007 edition

Discover stories from this section and more in the list of contents

→ Explore the edition

- Save
- Share
- Give
- Reuse this content



THE ECONOMIST TODAY

Handpicked stories, in yo

A daily newsletter with the best of our journa

Sign up

Give this article ×

Give anyone free access to stories as part of your subscription.

Learn more OK

More from International

The Economist



Plastics are greener than they seem

Even if the world needs to become much better at managing their waste

Xi Jinping's Trump-sized puzzle

For all its strength and swagger, China is struggling to handle an impulsive America



The War Room newsletter: Is American diplomacy all bark, no bite?



There is a vast hidden workforce behind AI

Will they become redundant as the technology develops?

The dangers of Donald Trump's instinct for dealmaking

Trade wars are alarming, but so are might-makes-right deals

The War Room newsletter: Why B-2 bombers are gathering on a tiny island

[in](#)
[@](#)
[f](#)
[X](#)
[♪](#)
[▶](#)
[🗨️](#)
 Get *The Economist* app on iOS or Android

THE ECONOMIST

[About](#)

[Reuse our content](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Economist Enterprise](#)

[SecureDrop](#)

CAREERS

[Working here](#)

[Executive Jobs](#)

THE ECONOMIST GROUP

[The Economist Group](#)

[Economist Intelligence](#)

[Economist Impact](#)

[Economist Impact Events](#)

[Economist Education Courses](#)

CONTACT

[Help and support](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Press centre](#)

To enhance your experience and ensure our website runs smoothly, we use cookies and similar technologies. [Manage cookies](#)

[Terms of use](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookie Policy](#) [Accessibility](#) [Modern Slavery Statement](#) [Sitemap](#) [Your Data Rights](#)

Registered in England and Wales. No. 236383 | Registered office: The Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam Street, London, WC2N 6HT | VAT Reg No: GB 340 436 876
© The Economist Newspaper Limited 2025