Trials for new malaria vaccine instill hope

By ACSH Staff — January 14, 2011

After reporting yesterday [1] on the looming threat of the spread of a drug-resistant form of falciparum malaria, we now bring brighter news of two phase II trials indicating that a leading candidate malaria vaccine (RTS,S/AS01E) provides protection [2] against the parasitic disease for at least 15 months after inoculation.

In a March 2007 to October 2008 study, researchers randomized 894 children aged five to 17 months old in Kenya and Tanzania to receive doses of either the malaria vaccine or a rabies vaccine and found that the RTS,S/AS01E vaccine protected 53 percent of participants against clinical malaria for at least eight months. At 15 months, the effects of the vaccine did not wane significantly, and 45.8 percent of the vaccinated children were still protected against the disease.

Results of the study are cause for a certain amount of celebration, says ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross since “creating a vaccine against malaria is extraordinarily difficult, and it has been in the research stages for decades. Hopefully, we can get the vaccine out to the people through local clinics so that immunization can begin rapidly once the vaccine passes the remaining clinical trials — although that requires much-needed public health infrastructure.”

In addition to using vaccines as a primary prevention strategy against malaria, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan says the widespread use of small amounts of DDT used in indoor residual spraying should be reinstated as well.