

## **Bio-Manguinhos and the Finlay Institute sign agreement for the production of vaccine against meningitis AC responding to WHO's urgent request**

***Goal is to avoid risk of epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa due to low world supply***

On January 16th, 2007, the Immunobiological Technology Institute (Bio-Manguinhos) of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Cuban Finlay Institute signed a contract for the joint development of and the transfer of technical information concerning the production of the vaccine against meningitis AC. The event had the participation of authorities from both countries and representatives from both partner institutions.

Present at the event were: Paulo Gadelha (Fiocruz's Interim Chair), Moisés Goldbaum (Secretary of Science and Technology and Strategic Inputs, representing the Ministry of Health), Dirceu Raposo de Mello (President of the National Agency for Health Surveillance), Akira Homma (Director of Bio-Manguinhos), Concepción Campa Huergo (Director of the Finlay Institute), Jose Goicoechea (Director of the State Council's Science Complex of Cuba) and Alejandro Costa, responsible for the Stock of Vaccines for Emergencies of the WHO.

The cooperation aims at the emergency production of the vaccine for countries of the so-called Meningitis Belt, in sub-Saharan Africa, due to a stop in the production of the meningococcal meningitis AC vaccine by multinational laboratories. The WHO solicited the collaboration between Bio-Manguinhos/Fiocruz and the Finlay Institute in order to avoid the discontinuation of the vaccine supply. "It is an agreement made for a greater good, performed through international solidarity", said Paulo Gadelha, Interim Chair of Fiocruz, during the ceremony.

Over 20 million doses of the meningitis AC vaccine will be produced during the 2007-2008. The vaccine will be distributed, according to the WHO guidelines, to countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan, in which the disease reaches high incidence levels. There is also the possibility of an extra demand for direct supply to these countries until the end of this year. Moisés Goldbaum, Secretary of Science and Technology and Strategic Inputs, reinforced the importance of the partnership: "The Brazilian Government has gathered efforts to develop the national the science and technology of the country. The agreement is not limited to an exchange between Latin American nations, rather a pressing event in which political interests overcome economic interests."

**The threat:** Alejandro Costa, responsible for the Stock of Vaccines for Emergencies of the WHO, presented the scenario of the disease in Sub-Saharan Africa, revealing a new tendency for the increase of the disease. "A wave of meningitis would have a large political impact in the region, due to an increase in deaths within a short period of time and a lack of antibiotics to fight the epidemic". In the best-case scenario traced by the WHO, the disease would affect an estimated 80 thousand people between 2007 and 2008, with an approximate rate of 10% of fatal cases. The worst predictors indicate a doubling in the number of cases of the disease.

**The partnership:** Bio-Manguinhos and the Finlay Institute have the necessary technology for the production of the polysaccharide vaccine against meningococcal A and C meningitis. The agreement between Brazil and Cuba will lead to the large scale production (as of march 2007) of the vaccine, making possible the distribution of the vaccine within a short period of time (by the end of this year) in order to fight the risk of a meningitis AC epidemic. "This agreement brings us to an important international technological level. Both countries are capable of entering this level in the world scenario", stated Akira Homma, Director of Bio-Manguinhos. The Director of the Finlay Institute remembered the long-standing partnership between Brazil and Cuba. "This project (of addressing the suffering in Africa) is a romantic dream that we once again share," she declared. This is an important and innovative initiative in which countries of the Southern Cone gather to meet to an urgent demand of the WHO for the public health of poor African countries.