

## Vaccine Introduction in India: status and lessons learned

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**Background:** Since the 1950s, India has been plagued with recurring, often massive, outbreaks of Japanese encephalitis (JE) in high-risk areas in several parts of the country. The first major JE epidemic was reported in the Burdwan and Bankura districts of West Bengal in 1973, followed by another outbreak in 1976. In 2005, the Government of India made a decision to introduce JE vaccine into high-risk areas following the JE outbreak season which claimed over 1,500 lives.

**Selection of target population:** After reviewing available data on the epidemiology, incidence of the disease, and availability of vaccine, 11 priority districts were proposed for implementation of JE vaccination campaigns in 2006 using the SA 14-14-2 live, attenuated JE vaccine. These districts included areas in some of the most challenging sites in India. Criteria for prioritization and selection of districts for JE vaccination included:

- Total number of JE cases reported (National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme)
- Incidence of JE in the district
- Recent JE outbreak
- Serological evidence of the disease (Indian Council of Medical Research)
- Epidemiological evidence

**Project Description:** With this decision, multiple steps were carried out to successfully launch the vaccine prior to the JE season. Multiple program inputs and planning were evaluated and put in place. These steps included; the immunization plan, training, licensing/importing of the vaccine, and monitoring and evaluating the program including AEFI reports.

**Results and Lessons Learned:** In the end 9.3 million children were successfully vaccinated in the first large scale injectable vaccine campaign in India. This introduction showed the power and importance of political will, as well as the role of partnership to help overcome barriers to implement programs. After review of the 2006 campaign, the Government of India has committed to a five-year plan to cover all of the highest risk areas of India.