Diarrhea is a leading killer of children in Ethiopia, causing approximately 14 percent of deaths in children less than five years of age.\(^1\) Rotavirus, the most common cause of severe and fatal diarrhea in young children worldwide, takes the lives of more than 28,000 Ethiopian children under five each year.\(^2,3\) Ethiopia is one of five countries with the greatest rotavirus burden worldwide and accounts for six percent of all rotavirus deaths globally.\(^2,3\) It is estimated that 28 percent of all under-five diarrheal disease hospitalizations in Ethiopia are caused by rotavirus.\(^2,4\) Studies in Africa show that the rotavirus vaccines are safe and effective against severe rotavirus disease and are cost-effective.\(^5,7\)

On November 7, 2013, Ethiopia will become the 17\(^{th}\) GAVI-eligible country to introduce rotavirus vaccines in its national immunization program. The burden of rotavirus disease in Ethiopian children, coupled with the power of rotavirus vaccines to prevent childhood deaths and hospitalizations, underscores the potential for Ethiopia’s introduction of rotavirus vaccines to save children’s lives.

Causes of death in Ethiopian children <5 years, 2010\(^1,4\)

Globally, rotavirus causes more than 450,000 deaths each year in children under five and is responsible for millions of hospitalizations and clinic visits.\(^2,3,5\) Nearly a quarter of a million African children die from the dehydrating diarrhea caused by rotavirus infection every year, accounting for more than 50 percent of the global total of rotavirus deaths.\(^2,3\) The vast majority of countries with the highest child death rates from rotavirus are in Sub-Saharan Africa.\(^2,3\)
Rotavirus vaccines are an essential, lifesaving intervention in comprehensive diarrhea control. Accelerating access to rotavirus vaccines will not only save the lives of Ethiopian children but also lessen the heavy economic and health burden of rotavirus disease, contributing to poverty reduction and economic growth. GAVI and its partners plan to support the introduction of lifesaving rotavirus vaccines in more than 30 of the world’s poorest countries by 2015.

For more information on rotavirus disease and vaccines please visit http://rotavirus.org.

REFERENCES