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## **New public-private partnership to develop a treatment for schistosomiasis-infected preschool children**

A newly established international public-private partnership (PPP) between TI Pharma, Merck KGaA (Darmstadt, Germany), Astellas Pharma Inc. and the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (“Swiss TPH”) has been launched to develop a new pediatric formulation of praziquantel to combat schistosomiasis - commonly known as bilharzia - in preschool children. Schistosomiasis is a chronic disease caused by parasitic worms. Globally, more than 200 million people are infected and would require treatment, mainly in developing countries with limited access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Treatment currently focuses on adults and school-aged children, but many preschool children are also infected. If not treated properly, the parasitic disease results in high morbidity involving anemia, stunting and reduced learning ability. In some cases, it can also be fatal. In terms of impact, this disease is second to malaria as the most devastating parasitic disease in sub-Saharan Africa.

Currently, infants and very young children who are infected with schistosomiasis cannot receive adequate treatment. The standard praziquantel therapy is available only as oral tablets for adults and children from the age of six. Moreover younger children cannot always swallow these tablets because of their size and bitter taste. A pediatric formulation is desperately needed to develop an adequate treatment for the most vulnerable age group. This has led to the establishment of the first international public-private partnership in schistosomiasis. The objective of this partnership is to develop a formulation of praziquantel more suited to young children.

The partners involved in this newly created consortium coordinated by TI Pharma are Merck, Astellas Pharma Inc. and Swiss TPH. “Dr Annalisa Jenkins, Head of Global Drug Development and Medical at Merck Serono, the biopharmaceutical division of Merck, and appointed President of the consortium says: “The partners of this public-private partnership are all committed to bringing this much needed therapy against schistosomiasis for young children. The resources and expertise brought into this consortium will ultimately support scientific and medical innovation and contribute to the development of the next generation of treatments.”

Merck brings a significant contribution to this project. The company develops and produces praziquantel tablets. The company is already engaged in the fight against schistosomiasis in Africa through its donation program with the World Health Organization. Merck is strengthening this commitment by initiating this project and bringing its product and drug development know-how.

Astellas Pharma Inc. contributes to the development of the first ever pediatric formulation of praziquantel by utilizing its innovative pharmaceutical technologies that help improve convenience of use and functionality through the removal of praziquantel's bitter taste.

As one of the executing partners, Swiss TPH will contribute its extensive experience in biological and pharmacological helminths research and its clinical research on the efficacy and effectiveness of drugs in endemic areas, generally low resource environments.

The Dutch non-profit organization TI Pharma is the independent partner which will facilitate the governance of this new project. TI Pharma has an extensive program on other neglected tropical diseases (euSEND).

An expert meeting was recently held in Geneva to define the desired profile of the new pediatric dosage. Subsequently the consortium team has identified several executional and funding gaps and is therefore calling for additional funding and partners to join in the fight against schistosomiasis.

All the partners are highly motivated to address the need to treat schistosomiasis in very young children, some of whom are only 3 months old when they become infected. The new pediatric dosage of praziquantel will make an important contribution to the better control and potential elimination of this neglected tropical disease.

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#### **About Astellas Pharma Inc.**

Astellas Pharma Inc., based in Tokyo, Japan, is a pharmaceutical company dedicated to improving the health of people around the world through the provision of innovative and reliable pharmaceutical products. Astellas Pharma Inc. has approximately 17,000 employees worldwide. The organization is committed to becoming a global category leader in Urology, Immunology (including Transplantation) and Infectious Diseases, Oncology, Neuroscience and Diabetes Mellitus (DM) Complications and Kidney Diseases.

Astellas Pharma Inc. is committed to increasing access to health in developing countries through its partnership initiatives. Astellas Pharma Inc.'s pharmaceutical research and technology labs have contributed to improving convenience for use and the functionality of treatments by developing novel formulations and bringing additional value based on its excellent pharmaceutical technologies (e.g. solubilization, controlled release, oral disintegration tablet and drug delivery technologies).

For more information, please visit [www.astellas.com/en](http://www.astellas.com/en)

#### **About Merck KGaA**

Merck is a global pharmaceutical and chemical company with total revenues of €10.3 billion in 2011, a history that began in 1668, and a future shaped by more than 40,000 employees in 67 countries. Its success is characterized by innovations by entrepreneurial employees. Merck's operating activities come under the umbrella of Merck KGaA, in which the Merck family holds an approximately 70% interest, with shareholders owning the remaining 30%. In 1917, the US subsidiary Merck & Co. was expropriated and has been an independent company ever since.

For more information, please visit [www.merckgroup.com](http://www.merckgroup.com)

**About Swiss TPH**

The Swiss TPH is an associated institute of the University of Basel. Our mandate is to contribute to the improvement of public health at international, national and local levels through excellence in research, services, teaching and training. The strategy to pursue our mandate is based on a broad interdisciplinary approach for a sustainable iterative process between the laboratory, field, classroom and bedside. We address the continuum between Innovation (developing concepts, methods and products), Validation (providing evidence for what works) and Application (strengthening public health systems & policies). Over 500 staff members from 58 nations are organized in two research and three service departments.

For more information, please visit [www.swisstph.ch](http://www.swisstph.ch)

**About Top Institute Pharma**

Top Institute Pharma (TI Pharma), a non-profit organization, enables research into and the development of medicines by establishing and managing international public-private partnerships. Within an open innovation model, scientists, the business world and patient organizations collaborate in innovative, multidisciplinary research aimed at improving the development of socially valuable medicines.

For more information, please visit [www.tipharma.com](http://www.tipharma.com)

Contacts for inquiries or additional information
Astellas Pharma Inc. Corporate Communications Tel: +81-3-3244-3201 Fax: +81-3-5201-7473 <a href="http://www.astellas.com">http://www.astellas.com</a>