

Antimalaria vaccine: Children not being used as guinea pigs - Ghana Health Service

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The Director-General of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) says no child in the country is being used as a subject for experiment of the antimalaria vaccine. Dr Anthony Nsiah Asare said that stage where people were used as guinea pigs to test the effects of the vaccine on human beings, has already been completed long ago in the laboratories. He told the journalists at the Meet-the-Press series with the Health Minister that, the Service is now undertaking pilot implementation for the next 23 years. "After we have finished and followed the children for that period then the World Health Organisation will then announce that we can use the vaccine for all children below two years in the endemic areas." We start it from six months, repeat it on seventh and ninth months and two years when they go for their Vitamin A supplementation, that is the difficult period," he said.



Ghana became the second African country after Malawi, to test the world's first malaria vaccine. The RTS, S vaccine trains the immune system to attack the malaria parasite, which is spread by mosquito bites. It's hoped the pilot phase will prevent at least 50,000 annual cases of the mosquito-borne disease, and save the lives of about 750 children. Following the launch of the project, a video went viral on social media to suggest that Africans were being used as guinea pigs. There were suggestions that the vaccination is a ploy to destroy the black race by making them impotent. But Dr Nsiah Asare rubbished all such claims.



He explained that pharmaceutical giant, GlaxoSmithKline, in its bid to fight the centuries-old-disease prevalent in African, parts of Asia and South America, out with a vaccine. They did the first clinical trial on American soldiers [not of the black decent] who have returned from malaria endemic area some 20 years ago, he said. He said they did the second and third clinical trials in endemic areas of Africa, Asia and South America. In Ghana, it was done in 2006 in Agogo and Kintampo in which 1,000 children were enrolled in the clinical trial. “The third trial which we took part ended in 2013 and they [scientists] have been following the children. The first child was showed when Kintampo Hospital had its 50th anniversary. She is 13 years now and has never suffered malaria,” he said. Dr Nsiah Asare said after the clinical trial, they realised giving the vaccination has helped save the lives of some over 100,000 people. He wants the public to ignore anti-vaccine campaigners and save the lives of their children.