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Singapore: A pneumococcal vaccine, Synflorix, by GlaxoSmithKline will be be introduced into the national immunization program in Pakistan. GAVI Alliance has announced that Pakistan will be the first country in South Asia to receive pneumococcal vaccines in the expanded program of immunization.

The introduction of Synflorix into the program was made possible through an innovative financing mechanism known as the advance market commitment, which is designed to bring heavily discounted vaccines to children living in the world's poorest countries.

This is the largest universal mass vaccination program against pneumococcal disease worldwide and is expected to help protect 4.8 million children each year. Currently 27,000 children die from pneumococcal diseases each year in Pakistan. Pneumococcal disease is the leading cause of pneumonia, which is the world's number one killer of children under five years of age.

Mr Christophe Weber, president and general manager, GSK Vaccines, said, "We congratulate Pakistan on the introduction of life-saving pneumococcal vaccines for children, which is possible with funding from the GAVI Alliance. Through our research and our work to accelerate access to innovative vaccines, GSK continues to play an important role in helping protect millions of children from infectious disease. Increased vaccination means more children will be able to live healthy lives."

At an event held in Pakistan's capital Islamabad, government officials were joined by representatives of the GAVI Alliance, UNICEF, World Health Organization and GSK to launch the program. Starting this month, millions of children will be vaccinated against pneumococcal disease.

Pneumococcal vaccines are expected to reach more than 50-GAVI supported countries by 2015. Kenya was the first GAVI-eligible country to introduce Synflorix, followed by Ethiopia in 2011. Later this year, Synflorix will be rolled out in Madagascar and Zambia under the AMC framework. GSK has been a long-standing partner with GAVI, and continues to supply more than 70 percent of its total vaccine volumes to developing countries. Synflorix has been provided to GAVI through the advance marketing commitment model at 90 percent discount. GSK will provide a minimum of 480 million doses of Synflorix to GAVI to help expand immunization programs against pneumococcal disease to 73 developing countries by 2023. By 2023, Synflorix may help to protect up to 160 million children in developing countries against pneumococcal disease.