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Singapore: The World Health Organization (WHO) is on the verge of approving a Chinese-made vaccine for Japanese encephalitis. The grant of prequalification status to the vaccine will open China's door to lucrative regional and global markets.

The vaccine has been developed by Chengdu Institute, which is a part of China's top vaccine maker China National Biotech Group (CNBG). Following prequalification, the vaccine will be eligible for quick procurement by aid agencies, including the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). China's national regulatory agency got a nod from the WHO in March 2011, paving the way for domestic manufacturers to apply for prequalification for drugs and vaccines.

A WHO spokeswoman said that prequalification for a vaccine against Japanese encephalitis, deemed a medium-term priority by the WHO, was "in the pipeline" but that discussions were confidential.

Dr Seth Berkley, CEO, Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), while speaking about this development said that "We think that the first vaccine that will receive prequalification will be Japanese encephalitis, out of a Chengdu manufacturer. If that vaccine does receive prequalification, we will work with that company to try to get that vaccine out to more countries in Asia."