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Singapore: A vaccine for malaria may soon be a reality as Melbourne researchers have made a significant discovery about how the body's immune system fights the infection. Researchers at the Melbourne-based Burnet Institute have identified a response, the body uses to protect itself against malaria, which they believe could help in the development of a vaccine for the disease.

Mr James Beeson, head of biomedical institute's research center, said, "The human immune system can recruit proteins found in the bloodstream to help prevent malaria parasites from infecting red blood cells. In a trial of 30 volunteers we found that the response could be generated so the immune system and the proteins, known as complement, worked together."

Mr Beeson further stated that though this was an important step in developing an effective vaccine, many tests and studies need to be further conducted. The team's findings is published in medical journal Immunity.

The World Health Organization estimates that malaria causes up to 600,000 deaths each year, largely among children in Africa. Teams of researchers worldwide have been working to develop an effective vaccine, with more than 20 projects undergoing clinical trials as of early last year.

Mr Beeson further emphasized that a vaccine was essential to eradicate the malaria. "Malaria parasites are gaining resistance to the drugs and insecticides, we use to treat them. So two of our important strategies for controlling malaria are at risk and this further stresses the need for development of effective vaccines," he explained.