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Letter to the Editor

The urgent need for cholera vaccine in India

Sir,

Cholera is a major public health issue in India, with outbreaks occurring frequently in many parts of the country. India has a long history of cholera outbreaks, and the country has experienced several devastating epidemics in the past. The disease is caused by the bacterium Vibrio cholerae and is transmitted through contaminated food and water. India has the highest burden of cholera in the world, with an estimated 675,188 cases and 10,582 deaths reported in 2019 alone.[1] Despite efforts to improve sanitation and hygiene, cholera continues to be a significant threat to public health in India and there is a need for a cholera vaccine to help prevent and control outbreaks.

There are currently two types of cholera vaccines available: the oral cholera vaccine (OCV) and the injectable cholera vaccine (ICV). The world health organization (WHO) recommends the use of oral cholera vaccines (OCVs) as a key strategy for cholera control and prevention.[2] OCVs have been shown to be effective in reducing the incidence of cholera in various settings, including during outbreaks and in endemic areas.[3] The use of OCVs is especially important in India, where there is limited access to safe water and sanitation, making it difficult to control the spread of the disease. The OCV is administered orally, and it is effective in preventing cholera in individuals aged one year and above. The ICV, on the other hand, is administered via injection and is approved for use in adults aged 18 to 64 years.

The OCVs have been used in several countries, including Haiti, where they helped control a large cholera outbreak in 2010.[4] Additionally, in India, the vaccine has been used in the past to control cholera outbreaks in certain areas. Recent studies have shown the effectiveness of OCVs in controlling cholera in India. A study conducted in Kolkata, India, demonstrated that the use of OCVs was associated with a significant reduction in cholera cases.[5] Another study conducted in Odisha, India, showed that the use of OCVs during an outbreak resulted in a significant reduction in the spread of cholera.[6]

Despite the availability and effectiveness of cholera vaccines, their uptake in India has been limited. One of the main reasons for this is the high cost of the vaccine and the logistics of administering them in remote areas, makes it inaccessible to many people in the country. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and understanding about the benefits of the vaccine among healthcare professionals and the general public.

In conclusion, cholera remains a significant public health problem in India, and there is an urgent need for cholera vaccines to help prevent and control outbreaks. The availability and uptake of the vaccine need to be improved, particularly in high-risk areas. This can be achieved through increased awareness and education about the benefits of the vaccine, as well as through government support to make the vaccine more affordable and accessible to the general population. The use of cholera vaccines can help save lives, prevent suffering, and contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of communities in India.

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