The results of the trial reported by Bejon et al. (Dec. 11 issue), in which the malaria vaccine RTS, S/AS01E was administered to children in Kilifi, Kenya, and Korogwe, Tanzania, are impressive. However, there are methodologic issues in the measurement of protective efficacy in sites where the transmission of malaria is falling. In such areas, transmission becomes overdispersed, and measuring protective efficacy against malaria over short periods may be inappropriate.

For example, the high protective efficacy of intermittent preventive treatment for malaria in infants that was observed in the first clinical trial in Tanzania was probably exaggerated by a fall in transmission during the trial. Administration of the RTS, S vaccine in adults was shown to give short-lived protection, and in the study by Bejon et al., the incidence of malaria was highest in the placebo group between 3 and 5 months after vaccination. This combination of decreasing transmission and protection over time could lead to an overestimate of efficacy.

Reassuringly, the high protective efficacy was seen in both sites; however, the study was small, the risk of malaria was highly variable, and transmission was falling. Similarly, the SPf66 vaccine showed high protective efficacy in low-transmission but not high-transmission settings. Testing RTS, S in high-transmission sites is a priority in order to refine estimates of SPf66.

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Antimalarial Therapies in Children from Papua New Guinea

TO THE EDITOR: In their article on antimalarial combination therapies, Karunajeewa et al. (Dec. 11 issue) conclude that artemether–lumefantrine has more favorable efficacy than dihydroartemisinin–piperaquine, even though fat was given with the treatment only in the artemether–lumefantrine group and there was no significant difference in the primary end point. Their per-protocol analysis with a high dropout rate from a small sample results in overestimation of the risk of treatment failure and wide 95% confidence intervals (6.4% to 20.0%). We reanalyzed data from 981 children younger than 5 years of age who were treated with dihydroartemisinin–piperaquine in seven clinical trials in Indonesia, Thailand, Uganda, and Burkina Faso. Dihydroartemisinin–piperaquine was administered with milk or a biscuit. Overall, the recurrence rate at day 42 was 3.1% (95% confidence interval, 1.9 to 4.3), ranging from 0 to 7.1%. The risk of recurrent malaria was significantly reduced after treatment with dihydroartemisinin–piperaquine as compared with artemether–lumefantrine (odds ratio, 0.51; P<0.001).

Dihydroartemisinin–piperaquine is a highly effective treatment for multidrug-resistant falciparum malaria in young children and provides clinically significant post-treatment prophylaxis. We recommend that both dihydroartemisinin–piperaquine and artemether–lumefantrine be given with fat (milk, biscuit, or other food) to increase bioavailability.

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Drs. Price and Nosten report serving as consultants to Medicine for Malaria Venture (MMV). No other potential conflict of interest relevant to this letter was reported.


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