

## News Release

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# Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany Donates 500 Millionth Praziquantel Tablet

- **More than 100 million people, primarily children, have been treated for schistosomiasis since 2007**
- **Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany provides WHO with around 10 million tablets for Ivory Coast for the first time**

Abidjan, Ivory Coast, October 19, 2016 – Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, a leading science and technology company, today announced that it has donated to the World Health Organization (WHO) the 500 millionth tablet to treat the insidious worm disease schistosomiasis. At a school located roughly 25 km north-west of Abidjan, representatives from Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, WHO and the Ministry of Health of Ivory Coast jointly announced the launch of the medicine's distribution in Ivory Coast.

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany's engagement in fighting schistosomiasis dates back to 2007 and involves 35 countries in Africa. More than 100 million patients, primarily school children, have been treated to date. "We are committed to further donating up to 250 million tablets annually until this devastating disease has been eliminated," explained Belén Garijo, member of the Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany Executive Board and CEO Healthcare. "Donating the 500 millionth tablet of praziquantel today demonstrates our strong progress in achieving this objective," Garijo added.

At a celebration held at the primary school of the village of Attinguie, representatives of the Ministry of Health of Ivory Coast and the British Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI) administered the praziquantel tablets for the treatment of



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schistosomiasis to the children. Depending on their height, the children receive between one and five tablets. Furthermore, the teachers explained to them the causes of the tropical worm disease. For this purpose, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany has donated a total of 20,000 educational booklets to WHO for Ivory Coast.

According to WHO, almost 20% of the Ivory Coast population requires treatment. To date, the U.S. development agency USAID and the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI) have supported the government of Ivory Coast in its fight against schistosomiasis. As a member of the Global Schistosomiasis Alliance, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany has been cooperating with both organizations since 2014. Within the scope of this cooperation, the company has donated to WHO at short notice 3.6 million tablets for 2016. Consequently, Ivory Coast is benefiting for the first time from the partnership between Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany and WHO. For 2017, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany will provide WHO with 6.5 million tablets for the West African country.

Schistosomiasis affects an estimated 260 million people worldwide. The infection rate is especially high among children, and the consequences are serious. The parasitic disease stunts growth, causes learning disabilities, and leads to anemia. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany is donating praziquantel tablets to WHO as part of its responsibility for society and within Health, one of its corporate responsibility strategic activities. Praziquantel is well tolerated and the most effective treatment to date for schistosomiasis. In addition, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany is supporting educational and awareness programs, researching schistosomiasis therapies for very young children and cooperating with partners in the Global Schistosomiasis Alliance.

### **Schistosomiasis**

Schistosomiasis is a chronic condition and is one of the most common and most devastating parasitic diseases in tropical countries. It is estimated that 260 million people are infected worldwide and that around 280,000 die from it each year. Flatworms transmit the chronic disease. It is widespread in tropical and subtropical regions where large sections of the populations have no access to clean water and sanitary installations. People become infected with the disease by worm larvae mainly in freshwater, for example while working, swimming, fishing or washing their clothes. The miniscule larvae penetrate human skin, enter the blood vessels and attack internal organs. The infection rate is particularly high among school-aged children. Praziquantel is the only active ingredient with which all forms of schistosomiasis can be treated. WHO has therefore deemed praziquantel, the most cost-efficient solution for the health of patients in need, as the drug of choice.

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### **The Praziquantel Donation Program**

Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany initiated the Praziquantel Donation Program in cooperation with WHO back in 2007. Since then, more than 500 million tablets have been donated and over 100 million patients treated, mainly school children. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany has committed itself to maintaining its efforts in the fight against the tropical disease until schistosomiasis has been eliminated. To this end, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany is donating up to 250 million tablets per year to WHO. The planned annual donation has a value of around US\$ 23 million. In addition, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany is supporting awareness programs at schools in Africa in order to educate children about the causes of schistosomiasis and ways to prevent it. Furthermore, as part of a public-private partnership, the company is researching a new formulation of praziquantel that can also be administered to very young children. To date, the tablets are only suitable for children older than six. At the end of 2014, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany founded the Global Schistosomiasis Alliance together with partners such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the U.S. development agency USAID, the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI) and World Vision International.

Further information on the fight against schistosomiasis is available on the [Internet](#).

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Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is a leading science and technology company in healthcare, life science and performance materials. Around 50,000 employees work to further develop technologies that improve and enhance life – from biopharmaceutical therapies to treat cancer or multiple sclerosis, cutting-edge systems for scientific research and production, to liquid crystals for smartphones and LCD televisions. In 2015, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, generated sales of € 12.85 billion in 66 countries.

Founded in 1668, Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, is the world's oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company. The founding family remains the majority owner of the publicly listed corporate group. Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, holds the global rights to the Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany, name and brand. The only exceptions are the United States and Canada, where the company operates as EMD Serono, MilliporeSigma and EMD Performance Materials.