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Merck partners with Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi)

• Merck is opening its compound library to DNDi to help find cures for leishmaniasis & Chagas disease
• Merck is intensifying efforts to tackle Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) as part of its campaign to provide Access to Health
• Merck is reinforcing its commitment to the London Declaration and the goal of controlling or eliminating by 2020 the ten neglected tropical diseases responsible for more than 90% of the global NTD burden

Geneva, Switzerland, April 19, 2017—Merck, a leading science and technology company, today announced a collaboration with Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) to accelerate the research process and reduce costs in finding new treatments for neglected tropical diseases leishmaniasis and Chagas disease, which 450 million people are at risk of contracting. DNDi is a collaborative, patient-needs-driven, non-profit drug research and development (R&D) organization for neglected diseases.

Through the collaboration with DNDi, Merck is working with a network of leading, internationally recognized experts in this area. In addition, Merck is supporting local R&D capacity-building via DNDi’s network of centers of expertise in R&D for NTDs in the Global North and Global South.

"It is critical that, all together, we take an end-to-end approach to addressing Neglected Tropical Diseases that are affecting more than a billion people worldwide. We need better, newer tools and solutions for many of these diseases. Through our partnership with DNDi, we want to help to speed up the materialization of a pipeline
of drugs to fight them,” stated Belén Garijo, Member of the Executive Board of Merck and CEO Healthcare.

A collaboration with five other pharmaceutical companies (Eisai, Shionogi, Takeda, AstraZeneca and Celgene), the DNDi NTD Booster experiments with a new open-innovation approach to drug discovery through a multilateral, simultaneous search process across the member companies. Through an iterative search process, companies continually examine their libraries for better matches as the search is refined, condensing the time it takes to find treatment leads.

“Early-stage drug discovery is expensive and time consuming. The Booster overcomes these difficulties by allowing DNDi to conduct multilateral, simultaneous search processes across the millions of compounds owned by the participating companies,” said Dr Bernard Pécoul, DNDi Executive Director. “Adding Merck’s compound collection to the Booster project increases the chance of discovering desperately needed new treatments for leishmaniasis and Chagas disease.”

By joining DNDi, Merck is also reinforcing its commitment to the London Declaration, an unprecedented public-private multi-stakeholder partnership to catalyze momentum in reaching World Health Organization (WHO) 2020 NTD goals to control, eliminate or eradicate 10 NTDs, including leishmaniasis and Chagas disease. When the partnership was launched in 2012, Merck pledged up to a tenfold increase in its praziquantel donation to fight schistosomiasis, the worm disease, until its elimination. Between 2012 and 2016, Merck increased its donation from 25 million to 200 million tablets. At least 218 million people needed treatment in 2015, with 90% residing in Africa.1

The Merck-DNDi NTD Booster Consortium collaboration is a strategic part of Merck’s Access to Health (A2H) approach to improve sustainable access to high-quality health solutions for underserved populations in low and middle income countries, through its “4As of Access” priorities of Availability, Affordability, Awareness and Accessibility. Sharing proprietary knowledge with leading NTD partners in areas where Merck has no specific expertise but have relevant compounds helps ensure that science advances and new generations of health solutions to address the needs of the poorest are discovered.
About Leishmaniasis

Leishmaniasis a disease caused by parasites of the Leishmania type. It is spread by the bite of certain types of sandflies. About 4 to 12 million people are currently infected in ca. 100 countries. An estimated 700,000 to 1 million new cases and 20,000 to 30,000 deaths occur annually.

About Chagas Disease

Chagas disease is a tropical parasitic disease mostly spread by insects known as Triatominae or kissing bugs. About 6 to 7 million people worldwide are estimated to be infected with Trypansosoma cruzi, the parasite that causes Chagas disease. In 2015, Chagas was estimated to result in 8,000 deaths. Most people with the disease are poor and most do not realize they are infected.

About Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi)

Founded in 2003 to address the needs of patients with the most neglected diseases, DNDi is a collaborative, patient-needs-driven, not-for-profit drug R&D organization. Its vision is to improve the quality of life and the health of people suffering from neglected diseases by using an alternative model to develop drugs for these diseases, and by ensuring equitable access to new and field-relevant health tools. In this not-for-profit model, driven by the public sector, a variety of players collaborate to raise awareness of the need to research and develop drugs for those neglected diseases that fall outside the scope of market-driven research and development (R&D). They also build public responsibility and leadership in addressing the needs of these patients.

About Merck

Merck 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 2016, Merck generated sales of €15.0 billion in 66 countries. Founded in 1668, Merck is the world’s oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company. The founding family remains the majority owner of the publicly listed corporate group. Merck, Darmstadt, Germany holds the global rights to the Merck name and brand. The only exceptions are the United States and Canada, where the company operates as EMD Serono, MilliporeSigma and EMD Performance Materials.

1 WHO, Schistosomiasis Fact Sheet, January 2017
http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs115/en/