

Paving the way for **pediatric praziquantel** accessibility in **Madagascar** (PEPRAMA)

Madagascar is calling for pediatric Praziquantel

Madagascar is one of the countries with the highest prevalence of schistosomiasis worldwide. Mass drug administration (MDA) based on Praziquantel is one of the most widely used strategies for controlling and eliminating the disease. At the moment in Madagascar, as in many other endemic countries, treatment is generally distributed through school-based MDA to children aged five to 15 years, hence excluding younger children. However, the new WHO guidelines propose an MDA at all ages, including school aged children.



Child receiving treatment in a primary health care center in the Boeny region, Madagascar

PEPRAMA wants to prepare Madagascar for the introduction of paediatric schistosomiasis treatment. Will parents accept the treatment for their young children? Will health care workers be willing and comfortable to treat young children? What are the best facilities to provide treatment? Our team is trying to answer all these questions by implementing an operational research study offering treatment with Praziquantel to young children at different facilities including primary health care centers, mobile units in the communities, churches and other public places. Through a mixed methods approach, indicators such as acceptability and feasibility of the treatment are being evaluated.

that will improve overall life of children in Madagascar.

So far, the implementation of the project is going well, with surprisingly high numbers of treatment uptake. Dr. Jochen Bitzer from the Else-Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung, major funder of the project, visited the study sites in May 2023 giving very positive feedback about the humanitarian action combined with the operational study

Our international team in Madagascar, consisting of young doctors, aspiring doctors, students from different fields and health care workers have already included the incredible number of 1704 children in the study so far with 1456 of them being treated with Praziquantel since February 2023. This marks a great success for the study!

Just in April this year, we were able to add two primary health care centers in the region of Fianarantsoa, Haute Matsiatra, as new study sites – with even more sites to come. Before starting, our Malagasy team on site received a training on the disease's backgrounds, information on the project and a course on Good Clinical Practices. Thus, now a total of 14 different primary health care centers plus two mobile units are included in our study. The inclusion of this new region in the study helps us to get a wider overview over possible implementation strategies for the treatment and the perception of disease and treatment which might differ aligned with the cultural differences and the existence of different forms of schistosomiasis across the country.

So, the project is going well, and it stays exciting! In the upcoming weeks the qualitative study part of PEPRAMA will start. So, stay tuned!



A blister of Praziquantel