

The Secretary of the 20th Expert Committee on the Selection and Use of Essential Medicines
Department of Essential Medicines and Health Products
World Health Organization
20 Avenue Appia
CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland

30 January 2015

Re: Statement of support for the addition of rifapentine to the World Health Organization Model List of Essential Medicines

Dear Expert Committee:

We are writing to express our support for the addition of rifapentine—an important tuberculosis (TB) drug with the potential to shorten therapy for drug-sensitive TB (DS-TB) and latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI)—to the World Health Organization (WHO) Model List of Essential Medicines (EML) and Model List of Essential Medicines for Children (EMLc).

For patients with TB infection and disease, access to rifapentine could enable faster, easier treatment. A phase III trial by the Tuberculosis Trials Consortium (TBTC) showed that using rifapentine with isoniazid could shorten LTBI treatment from nine months of daily isoniazid (9H) to just 12 once-weekly doses.¹ An extension of this trial enrolled 1058 children between the ages of 2 and 17 years old. Results of the extension study confirmed the safety and tolerability of 3HP in children and provided evidence of efficacy consistent with the adult study. Known as “3HP,” this regimen for LTBI treatment has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.² Additionally, rifapentine is poised to become an important treatment option for people with DS-TB. Future TBTC studies will examine rifapentine’s potential to shorten treatment for DS-TB from six months to just four months.³

The importance of addressing LTBI in order to eliminate TB and achieve the ambitious targets set forth in the WHO’s END TB Strategy has been highlighted in multiple recent initiatives and documents, including the WHO’s End TB Strategy; the WHO Executive Board’s recommendation to the 67th World Health Assembly;⁴ the 67th World Health Assembly Resolution on Health and the Post-2015 Agenda;⁵ the WHO’s *Framework towards tuberculosis elimination in low-incidence countries*;⁶ and the WHO’s recent *Guidelines on the management of latent tuberculosis infection*,⁷ which in certain contexts recommends shorter regimens, including 3HP, for the treatment of LTBI.

Shorter regimens are especially important for making therapy easier for children to tolerate and complete. To allow for simple dosing adjustments in younger children, Sanofi, the manufacturer of rifapentine, is developing pediatric-friendly formulations of 3HP—including a water-dispersible, fixed-dose tablet (isoniazid 150mg/ rifapentine 150mg) and a water-dispersible, stand-alone tablet (rifapentine 100mg). The TBTC has also committed to

conducting a study that will evaluate the pharmacokinetics and safety of the rifapentine/isoniazid fixed-dose combination in children 0–12 years old.

In December 2013, Sanofi, the manufacturer of rifapentine, agreed to voluntarily reduce the price of rifapentine by 57% for public programs in the U.S. This has helped to bridge the gap between TB research and practice by making TB treatment more cost-effective and simpler for patients, and suggests the company's willingness to price their drug affordably in other contexts, including countries where rifapentine has not yet been registered.⁸

Indeed, rifapentine remains unavailable outside of the U.S., even in countries where the drug has been studied in clinical trials. These trial site countries include Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Brazil, Hong Kong, Botswana, Vietnam, Spain and Peru. Adding rifapentine to the EML is critical for encouraging wide registration and for promoting equitable access, thereby allowing countries other than the U.S. to benefit from the treatment shortening capabilities of this drug. We ask the Committee to help make this life-saving medication available to TB patients who desperately need better treatment options by approving the WHO's application to add rifapentine to the EML and EMLc.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further and ask you to please contact mike.frick@treatmentactiongroup.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

Global TB Community Advisory Board
Treatment Action Group
TB Proof

¹ Sterling T, Villarino M, Borisov A, Shang N, Gordin F, et al. Three months of rifapentine and isoniazid for latent tuberculosis infection. *NEJM*. 2011;365(23):2155–2166. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa1104875.

² Lessem E. Sanofi's double-edged sword: rifapentine's manufacturer helps to advance TB research while stalling access. *TAGline*;20(2):14. Available from: <http://www.treatmentactiongroup.org/tagline/2013/spring>.

³ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Tuberculosis Elimination. Tuberculosis Trials Consortium completed and ongoing studies [Internet]. Atlanta, GA: Division of Tuberculosis Elimination, 2014 June 2. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/tb/topic/research/tbtc/projects.htm>.

⁴ World Health Organization Executive Board. Global strategy and targets for tuberculosis prevention, care and control after 2015 [Internet]. 21 January 2014. Available from: http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB134/B134_R4-en.pdf?ua=1.

⁵ International Institute for Sustainable Development. World Health Assembly adopts resolution on health and post-2015 agenda [Internet]. 24 May 2014. Available from: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/136471/1/9789241548908_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1

⁶ World Health Organization. Towards TB elimination: an action framework for low-incidence countries. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2014. Available from: http://www.who.int/tb/publications/elimination_framework/en/.

⁷ World Health Organization. Guidelines on the management of latent tuberculosis infection. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2015. Available from: http://www.who.int/tb/publications/lbti_document_page/en/.

⁸ Treatment Action Group. CRAG, TAG welcome Sanofi U.S. commitment to reduce the price of tuberculosis drug rifapentine [Internet]. New York: Treatment Action Group; 2013 December 12. Available from: <http://www.treatmentactiongroup.org/tb/press/2013/crag-tag-welcome-sanofi-us-commitment-reduce-price-tuberculosis-drug-rifapentine>.