

## £2.7 million for HIV research in Geneva

The Mintaka Foundation for Medical Research in Geneva announced today that the Wellcome Trust, London, has awarded it approximately CHF 4,500,000 to meet the remaining costs of bringing its flagship product, an anti-HIV microbicide known as 5P12-RANTES, to a first safety trial in the clinic.

Every year, there are millions of new infections from HIV. More than 95% of these occur in the developing world, and over half of these are women and young girls. For many reasons few are protected by condom use. To prevent infection, substances that can be applied to the genital area before sex, ‘microbicides’, are urgently needed. 5P12-RANTES has been developed for this purpose.

5P12-RANTES was developed at Geneva’s Faculty of Medicine by Mintaka’s founders. It is among the most powerful anti-HIV substances known, justifying the hope that it will be more successful than other, much less potent, candidate microbicides which have so far shown disappointing results. It is also exceptionally efficient at preventing the emergence of drug resistance, normally a major problem with anti-HIV pharmaceuticals.

Although it is the product of high-technology research, Mintaka has succeeded in producing 5P12-RANTES by fermentation in yeast, much as is done in the brewing industry, which is expected to make the manufacturing process cheap enough for distribution in developing countries. The molecule is also extremely resistant to heat, which will enable it to be distributed and used in the tropics without refrigeration.

“We are grateful to the Wellcome Trust for its support and very happy to see our plans endorsed by such a prestigious organization” said Prof. Oliver Hartley, Chief Scientific Officer of the Foundation.

“Despite the generosity of Wellcome and our other donors, we still face a substantial funding challenge, but this award will transform our situation, permitting us at last to test this molecule on humans, we hope before the end of next year” added Prof. Robin Offord, Mintaka’s Executive Director.

Ends

## Notes to editors

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### About the Mintaka Foundation ([www.mintakafoundation.org](http://www.mintakafoundation.org))

Founded five years ago by three professors at Geneva's Faculty of Medicine, Mintaka identifies health problems in the developing world that require high technology research to find a solution, but for which the solution, once found, can be made economically accessible to the most disadvantaged populations on the planet. In addition to its main, microbicide project, it is exploring others, including means for reducing death in childbirth in tropical countries, novel vaccines, and new approaches to containing *Plasmodium vivax*, a neglected form of malaria which represents a huge but underestimated health burden on the world's poor. Mintaka's microbicide effort has been supported by Swiss, US, and Swedish government agencies; the World Health Organization; the Geneva State Council; the US private foundations CONRAD, IPM, the James B. Pendleton Charitable Trust, the La Jolla Foundation for Microbicide Research, AmfAR; the Swiss foundations Esperanza Medicines Foundation, the Fondation Dormeur, the Lotterrie romande, the Fondation Sidaide, the Fondation Bios pour la recherche; and private donors in the US and Switzerland.

### About the Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £500 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing. <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk>