

# Global effort key to AIDS vaccine

GENEVA (AP) - The successful development of an AIDS vaccine will require global cooperation, but countries will have to carry out their own research to fight different strains around the world, the New York-based International AIDS Vaccine Initiative said Thursday.

"Only a vaccine can end the epidemic," said Dr. Seth Berkley, chief executive of the organization, which researches and develops potential AIDS vaccines. "Success requires a worldwide model of cooperation."

Berkley was speaking after a three-day conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, where 800 leading scientists discussed preliminary data on candidate vaccines which are entering clinical trials. More than 30 AIDS vaccine candidates are currently in such trials in 19 countries.

The search for a vaccine has been frustrating because the virus has evolved elaborate and effective strategies to elude the body's usual defenses against microbes, and it has developed into various strains in different parts of the world.

"It's the most important challenge, it's the hardest challenge we have ever faced in terms of a vaccine," said Dr. Wayne Koff, the organization's vaccine research chief.

The worldwide AIDS epidemic has killed 20 million people and infected 40 million more. Treatment efforts, such as the World Health Organization's plan to put 3 million people in the developing world on HIV drugs by 2005, are helping people to live longer, but this does not stop new infections.

"This treatment does not cure people, it temporarily slows down the disease," Berkley

explained. "It is not going to be a solution." HIV — the virus which causes AIDS — was first identified more than 20 years ago in Uganda, but "it is only in recent years that significant progress has begun to be made towards a vaccine," the organization said.

About 14,000 people a day are now being infected with HIV, a total of more than 5 million a year, the highest-ever infection rate. Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst-hit region, but the epidemic is now pushing deep into Asia and Eastern Europe.

Part of the problem in developing a vaccine is persuading drug companies to invest, as an AIDS vaccine would give poor returns, Berkley said. Of the US\$70 billion (euro57 billion) spent by the companies each year on health product research and development, less than 1 percent is targeted at an AIDS vaccine.

To develop vaccines for other diseases, scientists have been able to study people who were infected and recovered, but no one is known to have recovered from AIDS infection. The HIV virus is also able to mutate its shape to avoid detection, further complicating the search for vaccines and cures.

Berkley was unable to predict when an effective AIDS vaccine may be available, but the organization will know within three years how successful the current generation of candidate vaccines is.

This round of trials is unlikely to provide a global solution, and Berkley warned that "unless we have a serious effort, it's going to take a very long time."

"We have to have a pipeline of candidates," he added.

# Posthumous Ray Charles album No. 2 on U.S. chart

LOS ANGELES - Soul music legend Ray Charles returned to the U.S. pop charts on Wednesday three months after his death as his final studio album, a collection of duets with fellow recording stars, opened at No. 2.

The posthumously issued "Genius Loves Company," featuring collaborations with such performers as Elton John, Norah Jones and Willie Nelson, sold 202,000 copies its first week in stores to outpace new releases from hip-hop artists Jill Scott and LL Cool J, according to sales tracker Nielsen SoundScan.

But country star Tim McGraw remained at the top of the pop charts for the week ended Sept. 5 with "Live Like You Were Dying," selling 227,000 copies in its second week of release. His album opened at No. 1 last week with a better-than-expected tally of 766,000 copies, making it the biggest country release of the year.

Scott's "Beautifully Human: Words and Sounds, Vol. 2" landed at No. 3, followed by Cool J's "DEFinition" at No. 4.

For Charles, who died in June at age 73 after a long fight with liver disease, "Genius Loves Company" marked his first top-10 album in 40 years, according to Billboard magazine. He last landed on the pop album chart in 1993 with "My World," which peaked at No. 145 and sold 198,000 copies overall.

The singer's 2000 retrospective set, "The Very Best of Ray Charles," sold 242,000 copies. His biggest commercial success of SoundScan era was his "An-

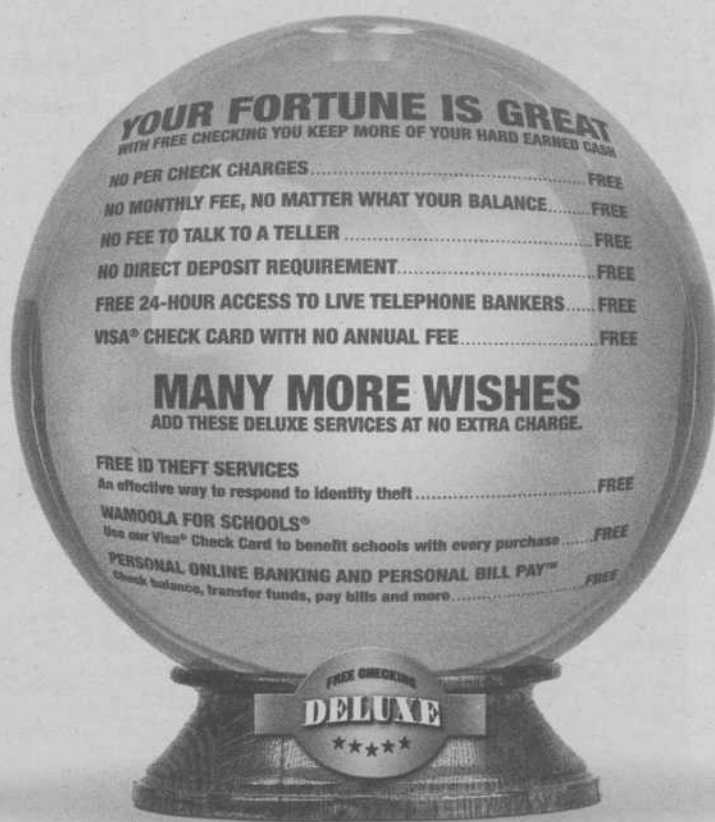


Soul music legend Ray Charles returned to the pop charts three months after his death as his final studio album, "Genius Loves Company" gains traction.

thology" collection, which was released in 1989 and has sold 600,000 copies since SoundScan began tracking sales at retail in 1991.

Charles, who overcame poverty, blindness and heroin addiction to lay the foundation for soul music and become one of America's most beloved entertainers, finished work on his last studio album as his health was failing earlier this year.

Hailed as "The Genius" and "The Father of Soul," Charles remains best known for such hits as "Georgia On My Mind," "Hit the Road Jack" and "I Got a Woman," popularly credited as the first true soul record ever made.



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