Yaws prevalence among the Aka in Republic of Congo in 2012

Introduction
Yaws is an endemic treponematosis often seen in isolated, marginalized populations. Early stages primarily affect children, causing self-limited skin and bone lesions. Untreated, after years of latency, 10% will develop disfiguring late lesions. The recent Morges strategy, based on universal treatment with single-dose azithromycin in affected communities, aims to eradicate yaws by 2020. MSF-OCP began implementing this strategy among the Aka pygmies in September 2012, with a follow-up campaign in April 2013. We conducted cross-sectional prevalence surveys during both campaigns.

Methods
The study took place in the Bétou and Enyellé Districts. At each treatment site, a physician screened Aka <15 years for active yaws. A treponemal rapid diagnostic test (RDT) was performed on children with lesions suspicious for yaws. Children with suspect lesions and positive RDT were considered confirmed cases. Prevalence was calculated at district- and village-level.

Results
6215 children were screened during the first round of treatment. 485 (7.8%) had suspicious lesions; 480 (99.0%) accepted confirmatory testing. Among those tested, 183 (38.1%) were RDT-positive and considered confirmed cases, of whom 107 (58.5%) were boys, and 89 (48.6%) aged 5-9 years. The most common clinical manifestations were papillomata and ulcers.

The baseline prevalence was 2.0% in Bétou District and 3.8% in Enyellé District; the spatial distribution of cases was highly heterogeneous. Prevalence was 2.3% in villages accessible by road; in villages accessible only by foot, it was 7.5%.

Preliminary results of the follow-up survey show a decrease in yaws prevalence. Full results will be presented at the Scientific Day.

Conclusions
We show the high burden of yaws in remote regions of Congo, underscoring the logistical challenges that yaws eradication poses. The follow-up survey suggests that the Morges strategy is effective in initially reducing yaws prevalence, but further evaluation is needed as the process of yaws eradication continues.

Yaws begins where the road ends.