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KARACHI: New infant vaccine to be available from August**By Our Staff Reporter**

KARACHI, June 24: A new combination of vaccines against diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, Hepatitis-B, Haemophilis and influenza will be launched under the infant vaccination programme throughout the country in August, said the national programme manager of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), Dr H. B. Memon, on Wednesday.

Talking to newsmen during the lunch-break of a two-day meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on polio eradication which began at a local hotel on Tuesday, Dr Memon spoke about the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation (Gavi) which in Nov 2007 approved a support allocation for the introduction of a pentavalent vaccine.

The support allocation amounted to Rs369.98 million for 16 countries, including Pakistan, after which the federal health ministry announced in January that the vaccine would be administered to children of under one year. Pakistan is required to co-finance UD\$14.572 million for the purpose.

Dr Memon said that preparations have been made for the free of cost introduction of the so-called Hib vaccines, which provide protection against eight debilitating illnesses, through rural health centres, basic health units, EPI centres and government hospitals.

When questioned, he maintained that that the delay in the administration of the vaccine could not be linked to the co-financing required from Pakistan. "Gavi intimated that the pentavalent vaccines would be made available to Pakistan in late July, by which time the EPI would have finished the relevant requirements such as the training of government-employed vaccinators and paramedics for the administration of the new vaccine," he said.

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It is estimated that one of every 350 children born in Pakistan dies of heamophilus influenza type-B (Hib) every year, while thousands others are left with a life-long disability. Researchers believe that Hib is the bacteria that most commonly cause meningitis in children under five years of age.

Polio case in Pishin

Dr Memon also informed newsmen that a new polio case had been detected in Pishin, Balochistan, bringing the number of polio cases detected in the country this year to 15. "This is certainly a matter for concern," he remarked.

"Given the emergence of the cases, a meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on polio eradication has been convened in Karachi at the request of the federal health ministry," he stated.

"The aim is to rethink the current strategies, identify the drawbacks and find the means to interrupt the transmission of the virus in the country, and particularly in Sindh. We are bent upon further streamlining the preventative measures and I hope that from the second quarter of next year, the country will be able to stop reporting new polio cases."

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