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Thursday, January 15, 2009

Staff Correspondent

## New vaccine to protect children from five killer diseases

First shots in Khulna today

Bangladesh for the first time introduces a new combination vaccine that will protect its children against five killer diseases in one injection, including the deadly bacterium Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib).

Hib causes some severe forms of pneumonia and meningitis. It is estimated to cause millions of serious illnesses and 400,000 deaths globally, the majority of them among children under five. Even with treatment, thousands of children die of Hib disease every year.

The new combination or 5-in-1 vaccine will protect children against Hib and four other deadly diseases -- diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and hepatitis B.

Health and Family Welfare Minister AFM Ruhul Haque along with health officials and representatives of UN agencies and development partners will administer the first shots of the combination vaccine to Bangladeshi children in Khulna today.

The vaccine will be provided under the routine immunisation programme to nearly four million children born in the country every year. As it records high routine immunisation coverage, it is estimated that Hib vaccine can save about 20,000 children's lives annually.

Director of Hib Initiative at Johns Hopkins University Dr Rana Hajjeh said, "Hib vaccine is a safe, effective and highly cost-effective intervention used for more than 18 years in developed and many developing countries. Where used routinely, it has virtually eliminated Hib disease."

Instead of three different injections (for DPT, Hepatitis B and Hib), children will only need one injection at three different times during their first year of life -- at the age of six weeks, 10 weeks and 14 weeks.

The introduction of the vaccine in Bangladesh is carried out with the financial and technical support from the GAVI Alliance and its key partners, including Unicef, WHO and the Hib Initiative.

WHO Representative Dr Duangvadee Sungkhobol said, "The introduction of new Hib vaccine will drastically reduce the burden of Hib disease. At the same time, the use of the combination vaccine containing five antigens in one shot will increase the routine immunisation coverage and it will result in reduction of morbidity and mortality from other vaccine preventable diseases."

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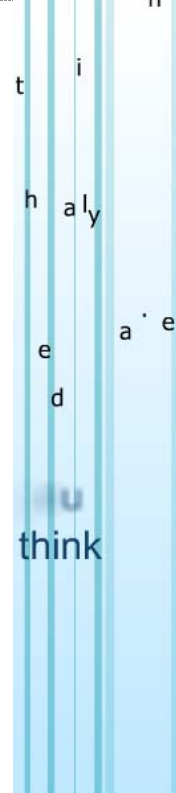
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