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Combination vaccine for children launched

DHAKA, Jan 15: Bangladesh began immunising children with a new combination vaccine on Thursday that will protect against some severe forms of pneumonia, meningitis and four other deadly diseases, the United Nations said.

The vaccine is being provided under the country's routine immunisation campaign for the nearly four million children born every year, the UN Children's Fund said in a statement.

Health workers began vaccinating children on Thursday in the southwestern district of Khulna, 136km southwest of the capital, Unicef said.

The agency said the vaccine could save the lives of an estimated 20,000 Bangladeshi children under five each year from deadly bacterial pneumonia and meningitis alone.

The five-in-one vaccine --- given three times to children in their first year --- also guards against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and hepatitis B, the agency said.

The combination vaccine was deployed last year in Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Unicef said they expected that almost every child would receive the vaccine, based on previous immunisation campaigns in Bangladesh that have covered 90 per cent of children.

Bangladesh has earned praise in recent years from the UN and the World Health Organisation for curbing child mortality rates through immunisations.—AP

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