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### New vaccine could save 20,000 children's lives annually in Bangladesh – UN

United Nations, Fri 16 Jan 2009

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Bangladeshi women and children 16 January 2009 – With the support of the United Nations, Bangladesh has unveiled a new vaccine to protect its children against five lethal diseases – including Hib, a deadly bacterium that causes severe forms of pneumonia and meningitis – in a single injection, in a bid to save the lives of some 20,000 children every year in the South Asian nation.

Annually around the world, Hib, or Haemophilus influenzae type b, is responsible for millions of serious illnesses and 400,000 deaths, mostly children under the age of five. Even with treatment, thousands of children die of Hib disease annually, with survivors often left permanently disabled – paralyzed, deaf or brain-damaged.

The new vaccine can prevent approximately one-third of life-threatening cases of bacterial pneumonia, the leading infectious cause of death among children around the world. In Bangladesh, nearly 25 per cent of under-five deaths are attributed to pneumonia.

Almost 4 million children in Bangladesh will receive the vaccine, which includes protection against Hib for the first time, as part of the routine immunization programme.

Experts said that since its introduction 18 years ago, the Hib vaccine has virtually eliminated the disease where it has been used.

The new immunization, which went into use in Bangladesh yesterday, also protects children against four other deadly diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and hepatitis B.

The programme is being financed largely by the public-private alliance known as GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization), which includes the UN World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank.

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