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**NEWS HEADLINES**

Baishakh 2 , Wednesday 15th Apr 2009

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**Taking a shot at pneumonia**



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Dr. Neelam Adhikari

Too many families in Nepal know firsthand the devastation that pneumonia wreaks on children. Each year, this terrible lung infection kills an estimated 11,000 of our most vulnerable citizens, children under five years old. As a pediatrician, I am overjoyed to tell parents today that they have a new way to protect their children from pneumonia.

Beginning on April 14, Nepalese children have access to a new combination vaccine that protects against five killer diseases in one injection. For the first time, this will include protection against the deadly bacterium *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) that causes severe forms of pneumonia and meningitis. Hib and another bacterium called pneumococcus are leading causes of life-threatening pneumonia and meningitis among children under five years of age.

In Nepal, we have made great progress in diagnosing and treating pneumonia locally so that even children living far from hospitals can access treatment. Yet preventing children from catching pneumonia in the first place is critical. Nearly 40 percent of Nepali children are underweight, putting them at increased risk for pneumonia. We must protect them.

As a researcher at Patan Hospital, I know that the Hib germ is present in many children's throats, more so among children who live in crowded conditions. This prevalence has been known to be decreased by administration of the vaccine. It is widely known that this vaccine is safe and highly effective in preventing infections caused by Hib bacteria and is a part of routine national vaccination schedule.

The diseases caused by this germ, mainly pneumonia and meningitis, are very severe. Even with treatment, thousands of children die of Hib disease every year. Survivors of Hib meningitis are often permanently disabled -- deafened, paralyzed or brain damaged.

Treating severe pneumonia can saddle families with impossible bills, and the emotional costs are even greater. The Hib vaccine can prevent about 20 percent of severe pneumonia cases, so this highly cost-effective vaccine will save many lives and reduce the burden on our health system. In fact, studies have shown that immunization has the potential to significantly boost economic growth. By improving the health of a population, immunization also improves their education and work prospects.

Prevention is also our best option for another reason: resistance to the drugs we use to treat children with pneumonia is increasing. There is no single solution -- besides giving the Hib vaccine to prevent severe forms of pneumonia, we need to encourage exclusive breast-feeding for the first six months of a child's life, improve nutrition, fully vaccinate children against whooping cough and measles, reduce indoor air pollution, and treat with antibiotics when necessary.

The new combination or pentavalent vaccine will protect children against Hib and four other deadly diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, and hepatitis B. This will make it easier for health workers to immunize all children. The GAVI Alliance, an international partnership devoted to improving child health, helps countries like Nepal afford to distribute the vaccine.

Despite the past decade's political disturbances, it is heartening to note there is increasingly good childhood immunization coverage all over the country in Nepal. In fact, Nepal is one of a handful of developing countries on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of lowering child mortality by two-thirds before 2015. We have made astounding progress, reducing the number of child deaths by 50 percent since 1990. The Hib vaccine promises to further speed this progress.

Today, we celebrate this milestone towards a better future for all children.

(The writer is Chief of Pediatric Services at Patan Hospital in

## News Capsules

### National

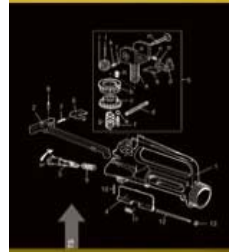
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Kathmandu and Professor of Pediatrics at National Academy of Medical Sciences.)

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■ E-Display

The E-Display banner consists of three distinct sections. The left section features the 'CITY EXPRESS MONEY TRANSFER' logo and the text 'SEND MONEY from all over the WORLD'. The middle section is a green advertisement with the text 'Dear All' and 'Feel the Advantages', accompanied by images of women and the Nepali word 'हातमा' (Haatama) and 'Money'. The right section is an orange advertisement with the text 'Hurry Up! Hurry Up! Hurry Up! 8000 sq ft space on rent in prime Narayan Gopalchwok Chakrapath for and other business purpose. For mo'.

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