

Vaccine against IPD launched in India

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Prevenar, a pneumococcal conjugate vaccine against meningitis, pneumonia, and septicaemia has been launched in India.

Pneumococcal disease is a group of illnesses caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, also known as "Pneumococcus". Infants and children are at greatest risk for invasive pneumococcal disease as 25-60 percent of them are carriers of pneumococci in their throats. The risks of meningitis and bacteremia are greatest during the first two years of a child's life.

With the recent introduction of Prevenar, a protein-polysaccharide conjugate vaccine launched by Wyeth Ltd in India, a sharp decline in the incidence of Invasive Pneumococcal Disease (IPD) among infants is anticipated. Prevenar is the first and only pneumococcal conjugate vaccine for infants and toddlers that protects a child against pneumococcal diseases like meningitis, bacterial pneumonia, septicaemia and bacteraemia (bacteria in the blood).

Dr Mark Fletcher, director, international scientific and clinical affairs, Wyeth Vaccine Research, Paris, France, said, "Globally invasive pneumococcal disease is responsible for more than one million child deaths every year according to the WHO. Research has shown that *Streptococcus pneumoniae* strains are now increasingly resistant to penicillin and other antibiotics and simultaneously the prevalence of these strains continues to rise worldwide. The focus accordingly needs to shift from treatment to prevention. Wyeth has therefore developed Prevenar, a seven-valent vaccine, which is used worldwide and is now part of the regular immunization schedule in many countries. Since the licensure of Prevenar globally in 2000, 30-40

million children have been protected against invasive pneumococcal disease."

Ranga Iyer, director, Wyeth Ltd, said, "Prevenar will protect children from invasive pneumococcal disease that is responsible for many cases of childhood mortality and morbidity. We believe that this vaccine-the only one of its kind in the world-will not only protect children from critical diseases but also reduce the disease burden in India to a great extent."

"Invasive pneumococcal disease staggers the imagination. It is a disease that takes 1 million innocent lives every year, all succumbing to IPD before their fifth birthday. Of those who survive, some grow up with permanent disabilities such as seizures, deafness, paralysis and mental retardation," Baldev Arora, area vice president, South Asia and South East Asia, Wyeth Ayerst, said.

Dr Nitin Shah, president of the Indian Academy of Paediatrics, and consultant paediatrician, PD Hinduja National Hospital, Mumbai, said, "Invasive pneumococcal disease has become a cause for concern amongst infants and toddlers worldwide and in India. This can cause potentially life-threatening illnesses. In today's environment there is need for a vaccine that can provide this much-needed protection."

Pneumococcus is commonly found in the nose and throat of healthy children and adults. Individuals who harbour pneumococcus in their nasopharynx can potentially infect others through close contact or airborne particles, such as those found in sneezes or coughs, though not all individuals exposed to infection will become ill. The colonization of pneumococci in young children is very common. Children are, therefore, both major carriers and victims of pneumococcal disease.

Invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD) includes bacteraemia (bacterial infection of the blood), sepsis (an infection in the blood), meningitis (bacterial infection of the lining of the spinal cord and brain) and bacteraemic pneumonia (an infection of the lung). The spread of pneumococcus from the nasopharynx to the upper and lower respiratory tract can result in non-invasive pneumococcal disease, including bacterial pneumonia, acute otitis media (inflammation of the middle ear) and sinusitis (infection of the sinuses). In cases of untreated patients or treatment failure, pneumococcal disease can lead to hearing loss, paralysis and sometimes death.

Prevenar is administered in three doses to children below the age of two years-6-10-14 weeks after birth and a booster dose at 12 to 15 months. It is already available in 75 countries, and is part of the national immunization schedule in six countries, including the US, Canada and Australia.

Currently, Prevenar is also cleared for marketing in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Curacao, Malta, Peru, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, Switzerland and throughout the 15 member countries of the European Union. Prevenar is also available in South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Hong Kong.

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