

only three cases of Hib meningitis infection occurred between 1991 and 1999, all in vaccinated or incompletely vaccinated children. During the same period, three cases of *H. influenzae* meningitis, caused by *H. influenzae* type f and a non-typable strain, occurred. The authors concluded that three doses of conjugate vaccine (two early doses with a late booster) are clinically effective in protecting children from Hib infection, and that epidemiological data such as these may be more useful than measuring antibody levels when judging the effectiveness of a vaccination programme.

In response to this study, a team in the United Kingdom described the UK experience, where a vaccine schedule of three doses at 2, 3 and 4 months with a large catch-up campaign for older children led to a 95% reduction in the attack rate of invasive Hib disease between 1992-1998 [2].

There was a large protective effect in unvaccinated age groups of children due to herd immunity (indirect protection). To assess individual protection from the vaccine, data on invasive Hib disease in 1996-2003 occurring in children born between 1996-1999 was analysed, and it was shown that direct protection from Hib conjugate vaccines given in an accelerated schedule declines rapidly over time. Therefore, excellent disease control does not necessarily imply high levels of indirect protection, and caution is needed in the longer term. The potential for disease to re-emerge after it has been initially controlled by a vaccine programme has been illustrated by recent increases in both the UK and the Netherlands [3].

The European Union Invasive Bacterial Infection Surveillance scheme (EU-IBIS, <http://www.euibis.org/>) is pooling surveillance data from European countries, including data on vaccine failures, and this will help to inform analysis on invasive meningitis trends, including those that may result from differences between national vaccination programmes.

References

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION DEVELOPS GUIDANCE FOR VACCINE SAFETY INFORMATION ON THE WEB

Editorial team

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The World Health Organization (WHO) Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS, http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/en/) was established in 1999 to respond promptly, efficiently, and with scientific rigour to vaccine safety issues of potential global importance. In 2003, GACVS launched the Vaccine Safety Net project. As part of this project, guidelines for websites which provide information on vaccine safety have been produced (http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/good_vs_sites/en/).

By encouraging websites that provide accurate information to be of high quality and the first source of information for the media and public, it is hoped that the guidelines will counter the proliferation of websites providing false or misleading information about vaccine safety, thus undermining public health messages.

The guidelines specify content that should be included on the site, and credibility information, as well as guidance on accessibility of the website and design. Organisations providing information on vaccine safety are advised to consider the guidance and enhance their information if necessary.

Since setting these guidelines, the WHO has evaluated a number of vaccine safety information websites against these criteria, and websites that meet these are published on the WHO immunisation safety website (http://www.who.int/immunization_safety/safety_quality/approved_vaccine_safet_websites/en/). This site already includes various European websites, and many more European and worldwide websites will be evaluated in the coming months.