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RECENT CHANGES IN MENINGITIS VACCINES FOR CHILDREN

The NHS vaccines against meningitis which have been administered to UK children have been changed on several occasions during the last 5 years. This is recognised by many parents who find that the vaccines scheduled in their older & younger children's "Red Books" are often completely different.

Younger children are far better protected against the various different types of meningitis than older children, including older brothers and sisters in the same family. In my opinion this is dangerous and misleading as most parents are not aware of these changes and therefore assume all of their children are equally protected against meningitis.

Pneumococcal Meningitis (IPD)

This is now by far the most common Meningitis against which we have effective vaccines. There are approximately 5000 cases of IPD in UK children each year. It is the most difficult Meningitis to treat, and despite modern technology, 1 in 10 cases die even if treatment is started early.

The NHS started offering Pneumococcal vaccines as a routine for children on 4th September 2006, but ONLY to those children under the age of 2 years, even though approximately 4500 cases of IPD occur each year in children aged 2-16. This means that ALL those children who were OVER 2 years of age on 4th September 2006 will remain without ANY NHS vaccine protection against IPD.

Prevenar 7

This was the vaccine introduced on 4th Sept 2006 and protects against 7 of the 23 different Strains of Pneumococcal Bacteria which cause IPD. Recently the Health Protection Agency (HPA) estimated that this vaccine has prevented the deaths of 300-400 children from infections with the 7 Strains against which the vaccine protects.

Unfortunately, for reasons which are not clear, the number of deaths from IPD caused by infections with the previously rare Strain 1 (against which Prevenar 7 does NOT protect) have increased markedly, resulting in approximately 150 more deaths each year from Strain 1 than were caused by Strain 1 prior to the introduction of Prevenar 7.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

The information and opinions in this document has been checked by me, Dr John Oakley, and I believe them to be correct. They are designed only as a supplement to a full consultation with me and should not be used as a single definitive source of information. My opinion may differ from that of some other Doctors. If in doubt, please consult another suitably qualified and informed medical professional.

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Prevenar 13

This new vaccine replaced Prevenar 7 and came into routine NHS use on 1st April 2010. Prevenar 13 protects against 13 of the 23 Strains causing IPD, including Strain 1 and the 7 Strains against which Prevenar 7 protects. Prevenar 13 is offered **ONLY** to children under the age of 2 years. There are **NO** plans to offer Prevenar 13 to those children totally unprotected against IPD because they were over 2 years of age on Sept 4th 2006.

There are no plans to offer Prevenar 13 to those children vaccinated with the older Prevenar 7 vaccine (used before 1st April 2010) who will therefore remain unprotected against the increasingly common and dangerous Strain 1.

Pneumovax

This is a cheaper and longer established vaccine against IPD. It protects against the 23 Strains of Pneumococcal bacteria which cause IPD, including the 13 Strains against which Prevenar 13 protects **and also** Strain 1. Because of the structure of Pneumovax it does not work very well under two years of age.

The NHS routinely offers Pneumovax to all people over the age of 65 years, but **NOT** to children unless they are considered 'high-risk' over the age of 2 years. This includes children with heart disease, kidney disease etc.

In my opinion **ALL** children over two years of age should be offered the wider protection against IPD provided by Pneumovax. This would mean that **ALL** children over the age of two would have equal protection against IPD.

Pneumovax vaccines are only available privately and are available at this Practice. The fee is currently £85; only one dose is required.

For further information please contact the Practice or visit the HPA website- www.hpa.org.uk/infections from which I obtained most of the information for this leaflet. The information is also available on our Practice website: www.drjohnoakley.co.uk

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