BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

Global shortage of Hepatitis B vaccines : PHE

August 9, 2017 | News

Health officials have announced emergency measures to put a temporary restriction on who can have a hepatitis B vaccination, only the most vulnerable people will get an immediate shot of the vaccine



Singapore: According to reports, Public Health England has recently announced a global shortage of hepatitis B vaccine. Emergency measures have been put in place to protect those at the "highest immediate risk" and are expected to continue until 2018, the body said.

The shortage is due to certain manufacturing issues, said PHE. Due to low stocks, health officials have announced emergency measures to put a temporary restriction on who can have a hepatitis B vaccination, only the most vulnerable people will get an immediate shot of the vaccine.

Officials have been provided with guidelines advising list of priority groups who should be given the vaccine under current restrictions. The guidance does not state how long these temporary measures will be in place, although it has been suggested by the National Pharmacy Association that the vaccine may be restricted until early 2018.

High-risk groups include infants born to hepatitis B-infected mothers, people with needlestick or other sharps injuries from a ‘known person’ with hepatitis B, and those with sexual exposure to an acute case of hepatitis B.

Babies are routinely vaccinated against hepatitis B at two, three and four months under the routine childhood immunization program using the combined vaccine. Since this combined vaccine is not affected by this shortage, routine immunization of babies would continue as before.

PHE further said that providers of the vaccine “should order only the essential stock for immediate use”, and that they “should not stockpile”. Responsible ordering “will help preserve scarce stock for those in greatest need”, it cautioned.

The move could see many at risk of a contracting the infection - that is spread through infected blood or bodily fluids and is 50-100 times more infectious than HIV.

The virus typically passes in a few months without treatment for most people but for some can cause serious liver problems. Hepatitis B often doesn't cause any obvious symptoms in adults. But in children it often persists for years and may eventually cause serious liver damage.

A PHE spokeswoman told The Guardian: 'The manufacturers are getting more stock in but there has been an issue for a while so that's why we have put this prioritisation guidance into place.

'We know that the Hepatitis B vaccine takes a long time and is quite difficult to manufacture.

'We will make sure those who really need the vaccine will get it, and those who are less at risk should get it at a later date. It's important to note that we are a very low risk country for hepatitis B, and the most at risk group are babies.'