

EU drug regulator OKs Novartis' meningitis B shot

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Europe's top drug regulator has recommended approval for the first vaccine against meningitis B, made by Novartis AG.

There are five types of bacterial meningitis. While vaccines exist to protect against the other four, none has previously been licensed for type B meningitis. In Europe, type B is the most common, causing 3,000 to 5,000 cases every year.

Meningitis mainly affects infants and children. It kills about 8 percent of patients and leaves others with lifelong consequences such as brain damage.

In a statement on Friday, Andrin Oswald of Novartis said he is "proud of the major advance" the company has made in developing its vaccine Bexsero. It is aimed at children over two months of age, and Novartis is hoping countries will include the shot among the routine ones for childhood diseases such as measles.

Novartis said the immunization has had side effects such as fever and redness at the injection site.

Recommendations from the European Medicines Agency are usually adopted by the European Commission. Novartis also is seeking to test the vaccine in the U.S.

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