

Vaccinated infants well-protected against severe pneumococcal infection in Norway

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In 2006, a pneumococcal vaccine (Prevenar®) was introduced in the childhood vaccination programme in Norway. Two years later, the experiences have been published in the journal *Vaccine*. The results show a strong decline in serious pneumococcal infections among young children.

Pneumococcus is a bacterium that can cause serious illnesses in some young children, e.g. meningitis, blood poisoning and pneumonia. Most of those who become ill are previously healthy without any known predisposing factors. The bacterium is present in the nose of up to 80 - 90% of healthy young children.

A growing problem

A major reason for the introduction of the pneumococcal vaccine in the childhood vaccination programme was a steady increase in the number of cases of severe pneumococcal infection among young children in Norway. The vaccine protects against seven serotypes of pneumococcus which account for 70% of the serious cases of the disease.

Good effect with no vaccine failures

"Having summed up the experience gained from the first two years after introducing the vaccine, the results confirm that it works as well as intended," says Marianne R. Bergsaker, senior medical officer at the Norwegian Institute of Public Health and co-author of the article in *Vaccine*.

"Among all children under two years, in the first two years after the introduction of the vaccine there was a 70 % decline of serious pneumococcal infections caused by the targeted serotypes, compared with pre-introduction figures," she says.

"We have so far failed to find an example of what is called vaccine failure for children who have received two or more vaccine doses," says

Bergsaker.

Practical details

In Norway, the vaccine is administered at 3, 5 and 12 months of age, i.e. a 3-dose programme. In most other countries, giving four doses of vaccine is common.

"Our experience shows that a three-dose programme is sufficient to give the children good protection. A three-dose programme is also advantageous because the vaccine can be administered at the same time as other vaccines in the Norwegian childhood vaccination programme. This makes it easier for both parents and the health services."

Good support from the beginning

In the first year there was already high accept of the vaccine. Of the children who were offered the vaccine in 2006, 95% had at least one dose, 90% received two doses and 80% had all three doses.

Source: Norwegian Institute of Public Health

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