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Govt to decide on launching pentavalent vaccine after getting expert panel views by March end

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Ramesh Shankar, Mumbai

Direct link to the News/Story:-

<http://www.pharmabiz.com/article/detnews.asp?articleid=54332§ionid=>

The Union Health Ministry will soon take a final decision on the controversial issue of introduction of five-in-one or pentavalent vaccine under the national immunisation programme in the country. The expert committee, set up by the health ministry to examine the entire gamut of issues related to the proposed introduction of the vaccine, will submit its recommendation to the government by the third week of March, sources said.

The expert committee, headed by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) director general Dr V M Katoch, is presently analysing all the five vaccines and the prevalence of the diseases covered by the vaccine in the country. It is also examining the mortality rates caused by each vaccine in the country. The diseases covered by the five-in-one vaccine are diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), hepatitis B and haemophilus influenzae type B (often known as Hib) which causes some severe forms of pneumonia and meningitis.

Sources said that the expert committee, which held its meeting on February 16, has constituted separate sub-committees on each of the five vaccines included in the pentavalent vaccine. The sub-committees, headed by experts in the field, will analyse each vaccine after collecting scientific data. "The expert committee will submit its findings to the government by the third week of March," a senior official involved in the issue said.

The health ministry set up the expert committee under Dr Katoch after the recommendation of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI)'s recommendation to introduce "pentavalent" vaccines under the government's immunisation drive became controversial with the experts in the field airing doubts over the need for universal vaccination for some of the diseases covered by the vaccine.

There are widespread criticism in the country against the introduction of pentavalent vaccine under the government's immunisation programme. The critics are of the opinion that the vaccines, which are of questionable utility, expensive and also carry possible side-effects, are sought to be introduced at the cost of public exchequer at the behest of World Health Organization (WHO) and vaccine manufacturers.

Sanofi aventis, Shantha Biotech, Serum Institute of India, Bharat Biotech and Panacea Biotec are among the major companies that had introduced pentavalent vaccines in the domestic market.