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For immediate release

Manufacturer recalls childhood vaccine

Merck & Co. initiated a voluntary nationwide recall on Wednesday for 12 lots of Haemophilus b (Hib) Conjugate Vaccine. The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health's Immunization Program is working with health care providers around the state to discontinue use of this vaccine and return any unused doses to the manufacturer. The recall involves two of the company's Hib vaccine products, PedvaxHIB[®] and Comvax[®]. Hib vaccine is part of the routine childhood immunization series and prevents certain types of meningitis (infection of the brain and spinal cord), pneumonia (lung infection) and severe throat infections.

The vaccine is being recalled as a preventive measure. According to Merck officials, equipment used to make the vaccine did not pass routine sterility tests. Tests of samples of the recalled vaccine lots, however, did not show contamination. Given this, state health officials deem the risk of any actual threat to health from the recalled vaccine to be very low. It could, however, result in some shortages of Hib vaccine supply. No concerns have been raised about the recalled vaccine's effectiveness.

The recalled Hib vaccine doses were distributed throughout the U.S. starting in April 2007. The concern with any vaccine contamination is the risk for localized or more systemic infection, usually within 1 week of vaccination. "Children who received the recalled vaccine in the last several months do not need follow up care or revaccination," said Dr. Cathy Slemp, State Health Officer, WV Bureau for Public Health. "Parents of children who received their Hib immunization in the last week should watch for any signs of infection or abscess, although it is unlikely to occur."

The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health's Immunization Program distributes Hib vaccine to Vaccine for Children (VFC) providers. According to Jeff Neccuzi, Program Manager, the

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Immunization Program is contacting VFC providers who have received recalled vaccines, asking them to immediately discontinue use of any of the affected lots and directing them to return recalled vaccine to the manufacturer. The program will also keep VFC providers apprised of any temporary changes to Hib vaccine recommendations that develop given the interruption in national supply. As always, any health care provider suspecting an adverse event from this or any other vaccine should notify the WV Immunization Program at 304-558-2188 and assure the incident is reported in VAERS, the National Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System.

In West Virginia, only 530 doses from the affected lots were distributed to VFC providers by the state's Immunization Program. This represents 1% of all Hib vaccine distributed through the WV Vaccine for Children Program from April to December. The Immunization Program does not know how many doses of the recalled vaccine were purchased and administered otherwise by West Virginia public or private health care providers.

Current immunization rates in the U.S. for Hib vaccine are high. In 2006, about 93.5% of U.S. children 19-35 months of age were vaccinated against Hib. For West Virginia, the immunization rate is even higher, at 95% for the same age group. This greatly reduces the possibility of increased disease due to an interruption of the national supply and serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining high immunization levels.

You may access this website for affected vaccine lots:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/recalls/Hib-recall-faqs-12-12-07.htm>.