

Vaccine-nation: ‘Globally-supported company is funding fatal polio shots’

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PM inspection committee condemns vaccines funded by the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation. DESIGN: AMNA IQBAL

ISLAMABAD:

A government inquiry has found that polio vaccines for infants funded by the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation are causing deaths and disabilities in regional countries including Pakistan.

The startling revelation is part of an inquiry report prepared by the Prime Minister’s Inspection Commission (PMIC) on the working of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI). The PMIC, headed by Malik Amjad Noon, has recommended that Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani immediately suspend the administration of all types of vaccines funded by the GAVI.

The report, exclusively available to *The Express Tribune*, also suggested suspending the mass polio campaign, including the administration of pentavalent vaccines – a mixture of five vaccines to cure five diseases – until an inquiry finds these vaccines safe for children. In view of these findings, the monitoring report recommends, “there

is a need to carry out detailed study and that should be submitted to parliament to seek approval for the EPI”.

The cost of the existing five-year phase of the EPI is Rs26 billion, including Rs2.4 billion funded by GAVI for the supply of new and under-used vaccines. The project was launched in 2010 to reduce morbidity and mortality resulting from eight diseases common to children. However, the report states, in 2010 as many as 5,417 cases of these diseases were reported.

The commission also recommended launching an inquiry to find out facts leading to the agreement with GAVI without examining the safety of the vaccines. The report also established that the GAVI-funded vaccines are not only causing deaths in many countries but are also very expensive.

There have been reports of deaths of a number of children and occurrence of other side-effects soon after the vaccination is administered in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Japan.

Geneva-based officials of GAVI, Jeffrey Rowland and Dan Thomas, were contacted by e-mail but they did not respond.

The report stated that five deaths have been reported in Japan this year soon after the vaccination was administered while 25 serious adverse reactions, including five deaths, were reported in Sri Lanka in 2008. Consequently, the vaccine was withdrawn. Bhutan also withdrew the vaccines after the deaths of children. The Association of Parents of Disabled Children from Bosnia and Herzegovina filed criminal charges after the GAVI-funded vaccines caused disabilities.

The report states, “The procured vaccines are not tested in laboratories to confirm their efficacy and genuineness. This leaves room for use of spurious and counterfeit vaccines”.

Noon said that the PMIC submitted the report to the Prime Minister’s Secretariat in June. Despite the urgency of the matter, so far no action has been taken, he said.

GAVI’s partners include certain countries, the Bill and Melinda Gates Children’s Vaccine Programme, International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, Rockefeller Foundation, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Health Organisation and the World Bank, the report says.

The government of Switzerland may be requested to investigate GAVI’s activities to find out whether it is really a non-profit organisation, as it professes. The report wants

the “propriety of the partnership of WHO and Unicef with GAVI to be questioned before the appropriate authority of the UN”.

“GAVI support constitutes 7.8% of the total EPI cost of Rs26 billion. Pakistan will be spending Rs24.2 billion from its own resources on the purchase of new and under-used vaccines at much higher cost as compared to their equivalent vaccines. Consequently, the whole amount will be flowing back to the manufacturers who happen to be partners of GAVI,” says the report.

“It is not the GAVI that has been supporting Pakistan. In fact, it is Pakistan which has been providing financial assistance to GAVI’s partner manufacturers,” the report concludes.

The PMIC, while quoting a health ministry report, stated that cost of EPI from 2003-2012 with the pentavalent vaccine was worked out at \$1.1 billion and would be just \$680.7 million without it. “The cost of pentavalent vaccine is double the price of equivalent vaccines in Pakistan and 23 times higher than its equivalent vaccines in India,” according to the health ministry report.

The PMIC quizzed the National Programme Manger of the EPI. According to the report, he denied that GAVI support was intended to benefit manufacturers of the vaccines.

Edited by Nadir Hassan

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