

MERCK LAUNCHES PRESERVATIVE-FREE HEPATITIS-B VACCINE
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/ADVANCE FOR AYEMS THURSDAY, SEPT. 9/

Company's Infant Vaccine Series is Now Preservative Free

/ADVANCE/ WEST POINT, Pa., Sept. 9 /PRNewswire/ -- Merck & Co., Inc. (NYSE: MRK), will launch its thimerosal-free, preservative-free hepatitis B vaccine (RECOMBIVAX HB(R)) in conjunction with guidelines published for its use in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's September 9 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). An approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the preservative-free RECOMBIVAX HB(R) came on August 27, following a submission of a Product License Supplement by the Company. Now, Merck's infant vaccine line -- including its combination vaccine against hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenzae type b (COMVAX(R)) -- is free of all preservatives.

"Merck recognizes that public trust in the safety of vaccines is critical to our childhood immunization program," Adel Mahmoud, M.D., President of the Merck Vaccine Division, wrote in a September 8 letter to U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher. "When government and industry collaborate in the interest of public trust, as they've done with the thimerosal question, our nation's children are the winners." According to Dr. Mahmoud, Merck is committed to working closely with the PHS and others to assure the speedy adoption of preservative-free vaccines for infants from birth through six months of age. "Our objective, as yours, is to keep immunization rates high and disease rates low," Dr. Mahmoud said in his letter.

The public health guidelines published in the September 9 issue of the MMWR, specifically state:

- Priority should be given to the use of preservative-free hepatitis B vaccine for all newborns.
- All infants up to six months of age should be vaccinated with a preservative-free vaccine, as available. Infants six weeks of age or older can receive either a preservative free hepatitis B vaccine or a preservative-free combination containing hepatitis B vaccine.
- Infants up to six months of age who are at high risk of perinatal or early childhood hepatitis B virus transmission, should be vaccinated with a thimerosal-containing hepatitis B vaccine if preservative-free vaccine is not available.
- Thimerosal-containing hepatitis B vaccine should continue to be used for vaccination of children six months of age and older, adolescents and adults.

Merck & Co., Inc., is a global research-driven pharmaceutical company with a commitment to preventive health care through the discovery, development and distribution of highly effective vaccines with strong safety profiles.

SOURCE Merck & Co., Inc.

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