13 November 2014

Statement on Tetanus Toxoid vaccine

WHO is concerned that misinformation circulating in the media about the Tetanus Toxoid vaccine could have a seriously negative impact on the health of women and children.

The Organization confirms that the Tetanus Toxoid (TT) vaccine is safe. The vaccine has been used in 52 countries, to immunize 130 million women to protect them and their newborn babies from tetanus. There is no HCG hormone in tetanus toxoid vaccines.

All vaccines administered by WHO and its partners have been prequalified. WHO’s prequalification programme is based on a strict, transparent, and scientifically sound assessment. The prequalification process includes a dossier review, consistency testing or performance evaluation and site visits to manufacturers. The process guarantees that the vaccine meets global standards of quality, safety, and efficacy.

The WHO Global Advisory Committee for Vaccine Safety recently published a report on immunization safety in pregnancy. The report stated that the vaccine has been widely and safely used for 40 years. Over that period, there has been a substantial decrease in neonatal tetanus and an increase in neonatal survival, and no signal of possible harm to pregnant women or their foetuses.

Tetanus is acquired when the spores of the bacterium Clostridium Tetani infect a wound or the umbilical stump.

People of all ages can get tetanus but the disease is particularly common and serious in newborn babies ("neonatal tetanus"). Neonatal tetanus can be prevented by immunizing women of childbearing age with tetanus toxoid, either during pregnancy or outside of pregnancy. This protects the mother and - through a transfer of tetanus antibodies to the fetus - also her baby.

People who recover from tetanus do not have natural immunity and can be infected again and therefore need to be immunized. To be protected throughout life, an individual should receive 3 doses of DTP in infancy, followed by a TT-containing booster at school-entry age (4-7 years), in adolescence (12-15 years), and in early adulthood.