

Saturday, January 13, 2007

## **Drug saves children**

### **Sanofi Pasteur vaccine put on trial in Nova Scotia**

**By Jennifer Taplin – *The Daily News***

A contingent of doctors and scientists - and an Olympic speed skater - are on a tour across the country to spread the word about a new meningitis vaccine.

The Sanofi Pasteur vaccine protects against four out of five strains of meningitis, a disease that inflames the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. The current vaccine only targets one strain.

"We, as pediatricians, are afraid of meningitis," said physician Dion Neame, medical advisor for the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada.

"The reason we're afraid of it is it's difficult to diagnose and ... even if we give the right antibiotics and we have fine intensive-care units like we have at the IWK, 10 per cent of children die."

In 2007, the vaccine - which went through clinical trials at Dalhousie University - will be used in a trial basis for high-risk patients. Minister of Health Promotion and Protection Barry Barnett said after a year, the department will evaluate it and figure out how much it will cost, and how widely available it will be.

"They are always expensive, but one of the things we try not to do is look at the cost, we want to look at the investment," he said.

For example, the flu vaccine actually cuts health care costs in the long run, he said.

There is a fifth strain out there that the vaccine can't protect against.

"It always worries me when there's a strain that there's no treatment or vaccine for. But the one thing I'm proud of is the work that's being done here at the IWK Centre of Vaccinology and across this country to identify ways to improve the health of Nova Scotians," said Barnett.

Shannon Osmond said it's very important to get her kids immunized. She and her children were at the IWK with their two kids yesterday for a medical appointment.

"When it becomes available we're definitely going to be getting it," she said.

Not so fast at the moment, since she's less than a month away from giving birth, Catriona LeMay Doan was an interesting addition to the news conference.

The gold-medal speed skater is a spokeswoman for the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada.

She said in an interview that she wanted to be a part of this to inform other parents about meningitis and what they can do to protect their children.

"If a name or an image or a voice can help then it's my honour. As a Canadian who has had success, it's also my duty and I take pride in that."

*jtaplin@hfxnews.ca*