



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **GHA INTRODUCES VACCINE AGAINST HEPATITIS B**

Her Majesty's Government is pleased to announce that protection against Hepatitis B will now be part of the routine childhood vaccination programme. Children born on or after the 1st June 2018 will receive a childhood vaccine that has the extra component already included, so that the child will require no additional visits or injections.

The new vaccine is called 'Hexavalent', because it protects against six diseases in one shot, (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Whooping Cough, Polio, Hemophilus B – and now, Hepatitis B). Although new to Gibraltar, the vaccine has been used extensively in other countries for many years and part of the UK schedule from last year.

The Director of Public Health, Dr Vijay Kumar, pointed out that Hepatitis B is a serious disease that produces jaundice and often becomes chronic, with a long-term death rate of 20% due to liver damage. The introduction of a vaccine that protects against hepatitis B is an important milestone in the fight against viral hepatitis and fulfils the World Health Organisation (WHO), recommendation that every country should routinely immunise children against hepatitis B as part of the global strategy to eliminate this virus.

Dr Kumar added: "The introduction of hepatitis B vaccine into Gibraltar's routine childhood immunisation programme at this time is also significant, as it comes soon after World Hepatitis Day, which takes place on 28 July each year and aims to highlight the global health burden from all forms of viral hepatitis as well as to galvanise efforts to tackle the problem. The WHO's goal of elimination of viral hepatitis as a major public health concern, it is hoped, will gradually be within reach."

Minister for Health, Care and Justice, the Honourable Neil F. Costa MP said: "I would like to thank Dr Kumar for providing his expert advice and recommendations to further enhance our existing childhood vaccination programme, which will now include protection against Hepatitis B. I am sure our entire community will welcome this positive development."