

Experts to discuss new child vaccine

By NATION Correspondent

Medical experts in pneumonia and meningitis diseases start a two-day meeting in Kilifi today.

Discussions under the Network for Surveillance of Pneumococcal Disease in the East African Region — netSPEAR — will revolve around the dramatic results from the latest pneumonia vaccine.

In a recent study in the Gambia, West Africa, the vaccine reduced by 77 per cent, the cases of pneumonia, meningitis and blood infection. It also lowered by 37 per cent first episodes of pneumonia in children. The vaccine also reduced child deaths by 16 per cent.

If this were to happen in Kenya, 20,000 child deaths every year could be saved, says netSPEAR in a statement.

In a similar study carried out in South Africa two years ago, the vaccine prevented 83 per cent of episodes of invasive pneumonia and reduced all episodes of severe pneumonia in otherwise healthy children by 25 per cent.

The vaccine also reduced the risk of pneumonia among children with HIV infection and decreased the number of infections caused by antibiotic resistant pneumococci.

Invasive pneumococcal diseases caused by a tiny bacterium are life-threatening, the most familiar being pneumonia, meningitis and blood infection.

The WHO estimates that each year, more than 200,000 children under the age of five die from acute respiratory infections in East Africa alone.