

# The Belfast Telegraph

TODAY'S NEWS TODAY

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Why does this top movie actress have such a low opinion of Ulster men? Find out by turning to page 3



# New child jab shock as disease cases rise

By Nigel Gould  
HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

A REPLACEMENT vaccine against a life-threatening disease in young children and babies may have helped spark a shock rise in the number of recent cases of the bug in Northern Ireland, the Belfast Telegraph can reveal today.

The DTaP/Hib vaccine was brought in to the province more than a year ago to help fight the serious Hib infection, a common cause of meningitis in children under the age of four, after difficulties with supplies of the original jab, DTwP/Hib.

Now, experts believe the alternative vaccine, also used in the rest of the UK, may have offered less protection against Hib, a bacterial infection which can also lead to pneumonia.

And there are fears this could have contributed to a dramatic increase in the number of cases in North-

## Fears over replacement vaccine grow

ern Ireland in the last year. Lorraine Doherty, a senior medical officer at the Department of Health, said: "It is a factor. But there may be other factors."

"There is no need for parents to panic. No action needs to be taken by the parent. They will be contacted."

"Eighteen months ago there was a problem with supply of the vaccine. "We had to look for alternative supplies - you simply cannot leave children unprotected."

Supplies of the original vaccine are now available and GPs across Northern Ireland, like the rest of the

UK, are being asked to give the DTwP/Hib vaccine to infants instead of the alternative.

Over the last year, a total of 18 cases of Hib have been detected in the province.

Thirteen of those involved children under the age of four, and in 11 of the cases the children had been immunised.

The remainder were older children and one adult.

Now, health chiefs have written to family doctors across Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK to highlight plans for the introduction of a one-off booster Hib jab to children

between six months and four years - starting in April or May.

The letter to doctors throughout the UK contains a recommendation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation that DTwP/Hib should be for primary immunisation rather than DTaP/Hib.

The letter adds: "UK surveillance data has shown that cases of invasive Hib disease have occurred in children who have completed their primary immunisation schedule."

"Children who have received at least two doses of DTaP/Hib vaccine as part of their primary immunisation course appear to be at higher risk than those who have received at least two doses of DTwP/Hib vaccine."

Since 1992, all young children across the UK have been routinely immunised.

Before that there were nearly 30 cases of Hib every year but the campaign saw a huge drop in cases.

### INSIDE

#### Fresh hope of move on talks

HOPES for a breakthrough in the political stalemate were revived today after Tony Blair's chief of staff visited Belfast.

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#### Nelly Odyssey show put off

CHART-TOPPING star Nelly today postponed his UK tour - including a March 24 Odyssey show - until the autumn. A "personal matter" has led to the concerts being put back.

#### Head to head with Murphy

GAVIN Mairs goes head to head with rugby's own George Best - Ireland's Geordan Murphy - ahead of his side's game with Italy in Rome on Saturday.

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# Protestants back devolution - just

By Noel McAdam  
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

BROAD support for changes to the Good Friday Agreement to ensure political stability is revealed in a new poll published exclusively today by the Belfast Telegraph.

Just over half those quizzed (53%) think making "appropriate" changes to the Agreement would be a better course of action than doing nothing.

The second day of results from the opinion survey also reveals, however:

- only a small majority of Protestants - 47% - prefer devolution to direct rule.

- more than a quarter of Sinn Fein supporters are opposed to IRA disarmament or "standing down".

- strong support for measures, including normalisation, which could

## Poll says election 'too close to call'

restore Stormont.

With the next Assembly elections due in just 10 weeks, the poll carried out by Queen's University and the Rowntree Trust indicates the results are too close to call.

The gap between Ulster Unionists and the DUP is closing and the gap between the SDLP and Sinn Fein "may have already closed".

A large percentage overall however (43%) think an Ulster Unionist/SDLP combination for First and Deputy First Minister is best, with a DUP/SDLP partnership next at 11% support.

There is unease in the

republican core support base. Apart from the 27/28% of Sinn Fein voters opposed to disbandment or a 'standing down' scenario, an even higher proportion (30%) say it is 'unacceptable' for the party to take up its seats on the Policing Board.

On the other side, however, 38% of Protestants - 72% of DUP supporters but falling to 24% for the UUP - do not want Sinn Fein joining the Board.

Researcher Dr Colin Irwin concluded: "In general people do want devolution but, at present, Protestants could 'take it or leave it', or so it would seem."

Predictably there is resistance among Protestants to further police reform and opposition among republicans to the IRA standing down, but acceptance of "all necessary

steps" for normalisation of security and projects to assist the transition of communities with paramilitary links.

The poll also shows support for an independent ceasefire monitor and commissioner to draw up plans and check progress on normalisation.

Dr Irwin, of the School of Politics at Queen's, argued it was difficult to understand why the Governments and pro-Agreement parties have waited until now to tackle stability, normalisation and community relations.

He commented: "It would seem to be the case that the people have got ahead of the politicians. Hopefully, now, the two Governments and pro-Agreement parties will do what has to be done to catch up."

See page 9; Poll analysis: pages 12-13

## 'Clean-up' was no stunt, insists UDA

By David Gordon

THE UDA was today denying suggestions that the dumping of 14 pipe bombs in west Belfast was a cynical public relations stunt.

Loyalist sources said last night's move was part of a "clean-up operation" in

Johnny Adair's former stronghold in the lower Shankill.

There are also plans to remove a number of loyalist murals in the area.

One senior source said: "There was internal debate over this. It was a brave move as it could have been misinterpreted as decomm-

issioning." Shankill loyalist councillor Frank McCoubrey today claimed lives had been saved.

"Only last week, three pensioners could have been killed on the Shankill when a pipe bomb was thrown through their window," he said.

Unionist and nationalist politicians gave a qualified welcome to the UDA's action.

UUP Assemblyman Fred Cobain said: "We hope that this move is the beginning of a wider effort to put all weapons and explosives permanently beyond use."

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# Creations



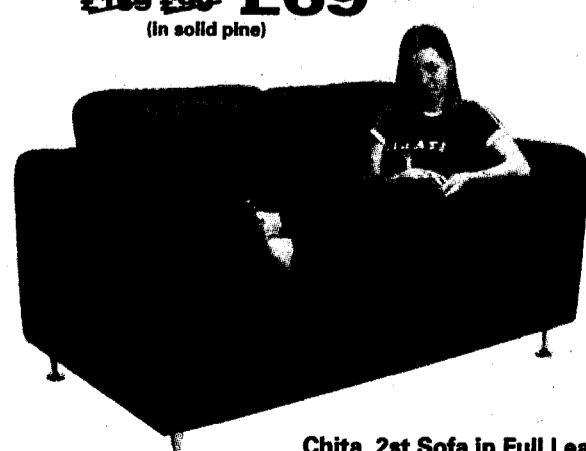
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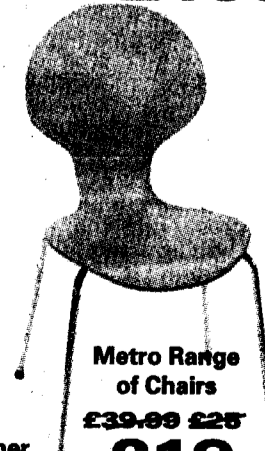
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