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“We are targeting 90% immunization coverage in next 2 years”

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Keeping in view the vast majority of children from the marginalized populations who miss the benefits of childhood vaccinations, the government of India had declared the year 2012-13 as "Year of Intensification of Routine Immunization." Now in continuation of routine immunization (RI) intensification and in line with the World Immunization Week 2013, identified states will organize four rounds of special immunization weeks for high risk areas during April, June, July, and August. The first round started on April 24, 2013. The ministry of health and family welfare, government of India unveiled a new logo for routine immunization during the first Special Immunization Week on April 29, 2013 at New Delhi.

Q: Please tell us about your ministry's new campaign and a brand new logo? How is it going to be effective in reaching out to those in need?

The latest health survey has revealed the key facts that neither vaccine shortages nor the logistics are a huge issue. But it is the unawareness among the huge population that is leading to this gap.

Hence it became very critical for us in ensuring this communication campaign. The new RI logo, TV spot, radio spot and posters and other communication material included in the campaign, will promote consistent messaging to raise awareness on the urgency of reaching every child with lifesaving immunization. It is in response to the dire need of ensuring that all the vaccines given free of cost, reach every last child in the country. I am sure that this campaign, "Bhool Naa Jaana, Tikakaaran Jarror Kaarna", will create a buzz everywhere across the nation and meet our target.

Q : What are the major challenges in implementation?

The result of 'Annual health Survey 2010' has revealed that 54.5% of the parents either did not feel need or didn't know about the importance of vaccine at all. Therefore, unawareness surely is a major roadblock in the RI programme. Imagine, there is a program where penny is not being charged and even parents are not required to leave their household and other chores for getting the child immunized. This doesn't happen anywhere in the world. Still the immunization circle is incomplete due to unawareness. The children in the remote areas are more vulnerable at a risk of the increased cases of diseases. Those 25% of the children in the remote areas, are not getting any access to these immunization programmes.

Q : How are looking at covering this gap?

Our system is well capable to reach every child. Polio is an inspirational story and now why not RI. We are targeting 90% coverage in next 2 years. Our focus is not one specific disease but all the major ones that cause health issues. It doesn't matter how many new vaccine will be added as we already have seven. Infact, the improved RI coverage and quality of vaccines will help us to cover and expand the universal immunization programme (UIP).

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