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Inadequate data hampering efforts: Health Min

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Inadequate data hampering efforts says health minister



Speaking at a function on May 5, 2014 to mark world environment day, the health minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan lamented that inadequacy of data is hampering efforts of the health administrators, whether at the center or in the states, to address emerging environmental health threats that need urgent attention and a proactive approach.

Dr Vardhan expressed concern about the insufficient data available with health authorities in India on adverse health outcomes and disease burden attributable to various environmental hazards. There is scant information available on the adverse impact on health caused by ecological and environmental deprivation at local, regional and national scale, he stated. "The movement of masses and a sizable population of migrant labourers make this mission difficult without inter-sectoral and inter-state coordination," he said.

For this purpose, the health minister announced that a Management Information System using IT tools will be developed for the benefit of central and state health departments. The minister said, "The United Nations, WHO and all international institutions have warned of the dangerous link between deteriorating environment and disease outcomes. We need to fight this negative impact by applying established tools to gather information, and share it with the community to involve them in this movement, for creating a healthy and safe environment. We also need to undertake a massive capacity building exercise to create a pool of trained manpower to achieve this mission."

As an example, he cited a typical case of silicosis, a disease that has resulted in profound morbidity and mortality but with little information at hand as to its magnitude and size. "A man arrives from eastern Uttar Pradesh, finds work in the capital's construction sector and soon gets tuberculosis and silicosis. When he gets sick and cannot work anymore, he goes back with no one realizing the true nature of his health problem," he said.

The minister commented that the health ministry and its satellites in various states need an institution like the Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute (IASRI). So for the short term, he has decided to commission a Management Information System (MIS) using IT tools which would, at the click of a mouse, make available a host of valuable data gleaned from computers at every tier of the health infrastructure.

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"My idea is to create an aggressive data collection system and research organization for the health sector which would preferably be autonomous. I will take up this matter with the Prime Minister soon and involve the state governments in the endeavour," Dr Harsh Vardhan added.

Dr Harsh Vardhan also announced a sanitation drive for a week in the government hospitals run by the Central Government in the capital and declared that he shall soon visit these hospitals to monitor the drive.