

“Mass awareness required on simple steps to control diarrhoea”

30 July 2014 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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"Our government has placed unprecedented emphasis on out of the box solutions to long-standing problems. So much has been done for so many years. What we now need are ideas which defy the trodden path and call for courageous action," the health minister, Dr Harsh Vardhan said.

The fact that India's health administrators failed to spread mass awareness on diarrhoea management speaks volumes of the inefficiency of previous programs, the minister stated. It is therefore time to think up novel communication vehicles, he added. Diarrhoea kills more than 200,000 children annually, the third biggest cause of child mortality.

The minister said, "We don't have forever to bring down the death rate. By September 2015 we have to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. I have therefore called for large scaling pooling of synergies to challenge the scourge of child deaths."

Outlining the rationale of IDCF, the minister said it would mobilize health personnel at both central and state levels and from the volunteer sector to give momentum to diarrhoea control measures. It is essentially a set of activities which include enhancing advocacy, step up awareness generation, establish more ORS-Zinc corners, enthuse ASHA volunteers to reach Oral Rehydration Solution packets to families with children as well as detect children in need of treatment.

The minister appealed to mothers not to stop breast feeding children under six months with diarrhoea symptoms. This is covered under IDCF's program for spreading knowledge of best practices on infant and child feeding.

Elaborating on the program through a presentation, Dr Mathuram Santosham of John Hopkins University, Maryland, USA and Dr Rakesh Kumar, joint secretary in the Health Ministry, said that during the fortnight intensified community awareness campaigns on hygiene and age-appropriate childhood feeding practices and promotion of ORS, and Zinc Therapy will be conducted at the state, district, and village levels.

Mr Louis-Georges Arsenault, UNICEF's India Representative, felicitated the Ministry for organising IDCF saying it would re-

energise India's efforts to prevent child deaths in the country by increasing access to life-saving interventions.

Dr Nata Menabde, World Health Organisation's chief in India, said, "Many children in the developing world cannot access urgent medical care for severe illnesses for want of hygiene, sanitation, safe drinking water and exclusive breast feeding. These should be the critical components of diarrhoea control."

Mr Lov Verma, union health secretary, said that there had been a decline in infant and child mortality rates in recent years owing to increased access to immunization and child health services.