

India to host SAARC health ministers shortly

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Mr JP Nadda, union minister of health and family welfare, will chair the meeting of the SAARC health ministers. The visiting health ministers including Mr Firozuddin Feroz, Afghanistan; Mr Zahid Maleque, MP, Bangladesh; Mr. Lyonpo Tandin Wangchuk, Bhutan; Mr Ahmed Zuhoor, Maldives; Mr Khaga Raj Adhikari, Nepal; Ms Saira Afzal Tarar, Pakistan and Dr Rajitha Senaratne, Sri Lanka will participate in the meeting.

Prior to the health ministers' meeting, the 7th Meeting of SAARC Expert Group on HIV/AIDS, 5th Meeting of the SAARC Technical Committee on Health and Population and the 5th Meeting of the SAARC Senior Officials (Health Secretaries) will be held during 6-7 April, 2015. The meetings are being organized in pursuance of decisions taken by the SAARC Summit of Heads of State or Governments held at Kathmandu in November, 2014. Approximately 50 delegates from all SAARC countries, including India, comprising officials and experts will participate in the technical and official level meetings.

The 4th meeting of the SAARC Health Ministers was held at Maldives in April 2012. The meetings, to be chaired by India, will deliberate and provide guidance and a roadmap for strengthening collaboration among SAARC countries on a number of issues and challenges faced by these countries. Some of the prominent health issues to be discussed include prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, disease surveillance network, health infrastructure, human resources for health, immunization for vaccine preventable diseases, HIV/AIDS, mental health, improving access to medicines and anti-microbial resistance etc. The Health Ministers will also discuss for adoption the 'Delhi Declaration' affirming their commitment to work together in identified areas and further strengthen health collaboration with agreed roadmap and timelines.

SAARC countries comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka account for nearly a quarter of the world population. These countries face similar health challenges and issues. The purpose of the meetings is to find out ways and means to synergize collective efforts, share strategies and implement identified best practices to provide better health and a better quality of life to the citizens of SAARC countries. These meetings also signal India's commitment to promote health cooperation in a more effective manner through the SAARC platform in keeping with the new policy of the Government of India to promote cooperation among the neighbouring countries.