

Nadda launches pneumococcal conjugate vaccine under Universal Immunization Programme

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“No child should die in the country from Vaccine Preventable Diseases” is the Goal & Commitment of our government. We stand committed to reducing child deaths and providing a healthier future to our children.” J P Nadda, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare said while introducing pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) in the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) of the country in New Delhi recently.

Terming this as an historic moment and an exemplary step in India’s immunization programme, the Union Health Minister added that the Government is committed to reducing morbidity and mortality in children. Strengthening routine immunization is an essential investment in India’s children and will ensure a healthy future of the country, he noted.

PCV protects children against severe forms of pneumococcal disease, such as pneumonia and meningitis. Currently, the vaccine is being rolled out to approximately 21 lakh children in Himachal Pradesh and parts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in the first phase. This will be followed by introduction in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan next year, and eventually be expanded to the country in a phased manner. Kaul Singh Thakur, Minister of Health, Government of Himachal Pradesh, Ram Swaroop Sharma, Member of Parliament, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh and Sanjeeva Kumar, Additional Secretary, Health, were also present at the function.

Reiterating the commitment of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi to save lives of children against vaccine preventable diseases, Nadda said that the Government has taken notable steps in the direction of total immunisation. Under Mission Indradhanush, so far, more than 2.6 crore beneficiaries have been immunized. From 1% annual increase in coverage of Full Immunization, Mission Indradhanush has resulted in a 6.7 % annual expansion in the immunization cover. “The immunization programme started with providing protection against 6 vaccine preventable diseases, it will now offer protection to our children from 12 diseases,” Nadda said.

The Health Minister further said that all these vaccines were available in the private sector for many years, not only in India but also across the world. “While these vaccines in the private sector were accessible to only those who could afford them, by making them available under the UIP, the government is ensuring equitable access to those who need them the most, the

underprivileged and underserved,” Nadda added.

“Pneumonia kills more children under five years of age in India than any other infectious disease. The pentavalent vaccine which was scaled up in all states under the UIP by 2015 protects against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) pneumonia. Now, the introduction of PCV in the UIP will reduce child deaths from pneumococcal pneumonia. It will also reduce the number of children being hospitalized for pneumonia, and therefore reduce the economic burden on the families and the health cost burden on the country,” The Health Minister elaborated.

The Health Minister informed that the ICT-based Patient Satisfaction System (PSS) “Mera Aspathaal / My Hospital” for implementation in public and empanelled private hospitals, is envisaged to empower the patient by seeking his / her views on quality of experience in a public healthcare facility. He further said that the Free Drugs Services Initiative, universal screening for non-communicable diseases for all people above 19 years to be rolled out shortly in select 100 districts in the first phase, the Free Diagnostics Services Initiative, the District Hospital Strengthening support, roll out of comprehensive primary health care, and Quality Assurance Programme - all represent initiatives intended to reduce fragmentation of care, improve quality of care and reduce out of pocket expenses.

Kaul Singh Thakur, Minister of Health, Government of Himachal Pradesh, stated that PCV is a very important for children as it will provide protection cover to all the children below 5 years of age from pneumonia and meningitis. Kaul thanked J P Nadda for launching the PCV from Mandi Himachal Pradesh. “This vaccine will support efforts of the state government in further bringing down the child mortality,” he added.

To raise awareness about PCV, Nadda also unveiled the communication material comprising TV and radio spots, posters, banners, etc. at the event. The Ministry has planned an extensive awareness campaign so that maximum number of people can avail these services.

Pneumococcal disease is the leading cause of vaccine-preventable deaths in children under five years of age globally and in India. India accounts for nearly 20% of global pneumonia deaths in this age group. In 2010, pneumococcal pneumonia accounted for approximately 16% of all severe pneumonia cases and 30% of pneumonia related deaths in children under-five years of age in India. Introducing PCV, therefore, will substantially reduce disease burden in the country.

Also present at the function were Vandana Gurnani, Joint Secretary (RCH, IEC), Prabodh Saxena, Principal Secretary (Health), Govt. of Himachal Pradesh along with the other senior officers of the Health Ministry and Himachal Pradesh Government and representatives of development partners such as WHO, UNICEF, PHFI etc.