

5m children immunised against measles: UNICEF

KABUL (Agencies): A new immunization campaign against measles has reached over 5 million Afghan children across the country, after some 11 million were already immunized last year, a spokesman announced.

The one-month campaign, launched in June by the Ministry of Health with support of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), was part of a global drive to reduce measles-related deaths by 50 percent by 2005, UNICEF spokesman Edward Carwardine said.

Measles, one of the major killers of children in the developing world, claimed the lives of nearly 900,000 children worldwide in 1999.

The success of the recent campaign and the previous one in 2002 in Afghanistan was unprecedented in a country facing a complex emergency, the spokesman said, adding that measles was estimated to con-

tribute to 15-20 percent of deaths among Afghan children under the age of five.

"The progress made in immunization efforts underlines steady improvements in the infrastructure and systems available to health teams as part of the country's Expanded Program on Immunization," he said.

Such improvements include investments in cold chain systems, the equipment and training required to ensure the safe storage and transport of vaccine, and training of health workers.

"The increased use of women vaccinators over the last 18 months has also improved access to households, and thus enhanced the ability to reach every child," said Carwardine.

Afghanistan has since seen a notable reduction in the number of reported cases of measles, from over 400 per month in January 2002 to less than 50

per month by mid-2003, he said.

"The success of the June campaign is another step forward in the already drastic reduction of measles incidence in Afghanistan," the spokesman added.

However, he said that continued efforts should be made through routine vaccination activities to maintain the necessary coverage levels to interrupt the transmission of the measles virus.

Sunday's announcement came as the Technical Advisory Group on Afghanistan, an international advisory body for the global polio eradication initiative, praised the country's efforts to tackle polio, another major killer disease affecting children.

The group at its meeting in Geneva last month lauded Afghanistan for its achievements made in the last two years under the extremely difficult circumstances.

Anti-hepatitis drive launched

By Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR, Aug 4: The NWFP government here on Monday launched a week-long anti-hepatitis campaign throughout the province to raise awareness among the people regarding the dreaded ailment.

Camps were established at various points in the city where the people were given free information about the ways and means to prevent them from being infected with hepatitis. On the occasion, vaccines were provided to the people on discounted rates.

The chief executive of the Lady Reading Hospital, Brigadier Dr Habibur Rehman, while inaugurating the vaccination camp at the hospital premises, said that hepatitis was preventable through precautionary measures.

He urged the people to refrain from using used syringes for injection and said that the patients should insist on using new syringes when they go to the hospitals or clinics. He said that the people should avoid shaving at barbers' shop and transfusion of unscreened and contaminated blood at the hospitals.

He said that hepatitis B was curable, whereas for C type there was no treatment and the only way was to adopt cleanliness in routine life. He stressed the doctors to avoid administration of injections to the patients if they

could take oral medication.

Dr Rehman also warned against piercing of ears and nose with contaminated sharpnells, saying these customs were also against the religion of Islam. He stressed the need of destroying the used syringes by burning or burying them.

Besides use of unsterilized syringes, contaminated surgical and dental instruments were also among the causative agents of the hepatitis, saying that the doctors should use standardised process of sterilization to save the people from getting the infection.

He said that the young scrap collectors took the used syringes from the hospital wards and sold them to the dealers from where they were recycled and repacked to be remarketed. Therefore, he said this was responsibility of the health workers to ensure that the discard syringes do not fall into the hands of the scrap collectors.

On the occasion, information regarding hepatitis were displayed on special screen at the OPD and people were provided with vaccines on discounted rates at the camp established at the LRH.

Meanwhile, local hepatologist, Prof Dr Najibul Haq, while talking to reporters, said that the districts of Peshawar, Mardan,

Buner and Dir were worst affected, where every fifth person in every household happened to be the victims of the hepatitis B or C.

Dr Najib, who is also head of the task force recently constituted by the provincial government on hepatitis, said that because of the rising cost of treatment, it was of paramount importance to raise awareness among the people to save them from the disease.

He also informed that the government was considering an institution of hepatology, where the doctors, nurses and health workers would be imparted with necessary know-how regarding the killer ailment.

According to him, the government was also considering a plan to provide hepatitis C injections to the infected people on discounted prices to enable them to continue their treatment. In this connection, he said the government would contact the manufacturers of these injections very soon.

Likewise, Dr Najib said efforts were under way to provide all investigative facilities to the people at the state-run hospitals and introduce educative programme to provide information to the people on sustainable basis to save them from falling victim to the disease.

Health
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