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Govt targets elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis by 2021

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Announces scale-up of Triple Drug Therapy to achieve elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis



Union Health & Family Welfare Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, announced an aggressive strategy to address and eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis by 2021. Inaugurating the national symposium on 'United to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis' organized by the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP) in New Delhi, he stressed upon the importance of building a mass movement or 'Jan Andolan' to address this preventable vector borne disease which affects is still endemic in 160 districts across India.

The minister in his address during the symposium said, "Elimination by 2021 is possible if we foster greater collaboration and commitment by all stakeholders including global public health experts, national & state representatives, partners & donors. Strategies like Triple Drug Therapy or IDA [Ivermectin, diethylcarbamazine (DEC) and Albendazole] with strengthened program delivery and robust community engagement are required to improve the quality of Mass Drug Administration (MDA) rounds". **Dr. Harsh Vardhan reiterated the Government's commitment towards achieving elimination by 2021.**

The national symposium brought over 300 participants including stakeholders including global and national public health experts, partners & donors, research organizations, pharmaceutical companies deliberated on building a common vision towards achieving the elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis. This included the Principal Secretaries, Health and Family Welfare from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and the Mission Director- National Health Mission, Government of Bihar who shared learnings and best practices from the recent pilot rollout of IDA in these states.

The day long deliberation by the national and international experts on addressing Lymphatic Filariasis concluded with the following recommendation and commitments:

- A multi-sectorial integrated approach to the implementation of LF elimination program goals that improve national coordination, facilitates partner collaboration, improved vector control and management.
- Successes from the other national health programs like polio eradication programme, best practices undertaken by states in the IDA pilot districts will be scaled up in all endemic districts. A 'Mission Mode' approach will be adopted to meet the elimination target by 2021 and adequate finances and resources will be allocated by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- Improved communication and social mobilization have significant impact on dissemination of messages on the need and benefits of MDA to the community. Various channels of social mobilization will be leveraged for improving awareness among communities living in endemic districts.
- Political and programmatic prioritization at the national and state level will be essential to improve programme visibility and trust among communities about the benefits of preventive drugs administered to the at-risk communities.
- Mass movement (Jan Andolan) like undertaken for POSHAN Abhiyaan and FIT India movement need to be adopted to reach every household for accelerating elimination efforts.
- Collaborations with organizations such as NITI Aayog, ICMR, Ministry of AYUSH and other research institutions will be explored to improve programme delivery and effectiveness.
- Access to Morbidity Management and Disability Prevention services through a basic package will be ensured. Capacity-building of the peripheral health staff/volunteers for early management and referral will serve as the backbone for making an impact on the ground. Access to people suffering from hydrocele through surgical correction will be ensured at public health facilities free of cost.

The symposium was also attended by senior ministry of health dignitaries including Preeti Sudan, Union Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare; Dr. Sanjay Tyagi, Director General Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare; Manoj Jhalani, Special Secretary & Mission Director (NHM), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India; and Rekha Shukla, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. Other senior dignitaries included Professor Vinod K Paul, Member, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog; Professor Balram Bhargava, Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR); Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary, Ministry of AYUSH; Dr. Payden, Deputy Head World Health Organization Representative to India and M. Hari Menon, Country Director, India, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.