

Mission Indradhanush: India steps up immunization efforts

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The health minister Mr JP Nadda sought the cooperation and support of various stakeholders including civil society, development partners, states, political leaders, and the media for creating awareness regarding the importance of fully immunizing every child against all vaccine preventable diseases in the country. He was speaking at the launch of the multi-media campaign for Mission Indradhanush. Mission Indradhanush, depicting the seven colors of the rainbow, aims to cover all those children by 2020 who are either unvaccinated or are partially vaccinated against seven vaccine preventable diseases which include diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, tuberculosis, measles, and hepatitis B.

The Prime Minister, in a message sent for the media launch of the Mission Indradhanush, expressed happiness that the ministry of health and family welfare has launched the nationwide initiative to protect children from seven life threatening diseases that can be easily prevented by vaccines. He congratulated the Ministry for taking up this initiative and extended his best wishes for its success. He also appealed to the parents and guardians of all children to ensure that their children are fully vaccinated.

Speaking at the occasion, the Health Minister reiterated the importance of immunization for all children. "A nation cannot be healthy when its children, who are its most valuable assets, are not healthy. This can happen when we immunize all children against all vaccine preventable diseases," he said. Elaborating on Mission Indradhanush which seeks to achieve this goal, the Health Minister informed that between 2009-2013 immunisation coverage has increased from 61 percent to 65 percent, indicating only 1 percent increase in coverage every year. To accelerate the process of immunization by covering 5 percent and more children every year, the Mission Mode has been adopted to achieve target of full coverage by 2020. The Minister stated that 201 high-focus districts will be taken up for implementation in the first phase. Of these, 82 districts are in just four states of UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and nearly 25 percent of the unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children of India are in these 82 districts of four states. Moreover, 297 will be targeted for the second phase.

The minister stated that the micro plans developed to make the Mission successful will draw on the lessons learned from the Polio eradication program towards systems strengthening, vaccine cold chain management, regular surveillance and

monitoring of the plans to reach each and every left out and uncovered child.

Highlighting the critical importance of a targeted and effective IEC campaign, Mr Nadda stated that studies have revealed that children are left uncovered by the routine immunisation programme either because the parents and guardians are unaware of the drive, or there is some element of apprehension or fear due to vaccination. Both these can be effectively addressed through an awareness campaign which underlines the critical importance of vaccination, and removes any apprehension harboured by the parent or the guardian. He appealed to them to participate in the Mission Indradhanush to ensure that no child is left uncovered during the rounds that will commence soon. Terming media as a powerful instrument that can bring about an everlasting change in the society through changing mindsets and generating awareness about various issues, the Health Minister stated that he looks at them to guide the Ministry at various stages in its endeavor to successfully implement the ambitious Mission.

Health Secretary, Mr Bhanu Pratap Sharma underscored the challenges that face the effective implementation of the Mission given the scale of the country and the difficulties in reaching children living in rural and remote areas, riverine mining units, far flung and remote hamlets etc. He stated that the team of AHSAs and ANMs are committed in their endeavor to make the Mission a success. The Ministry has particularly paid attention to systems strengthening and capacity building of the frontline workers in this Mission Mode.

Also present at the function were Mr Louis-Georges Arsenault, UNICEF representative, India; Dr Nata Menabde, WHO representative, India; Mr Deepak Kapur, chairperson, Rotary India National PolioPlus Committee; Prof. Laxminarayan Ramanan, vice president, PHFI -ITSU; Dr (Prof) Jagdish Prasad, DGHS, Health Ministry and other senior officers of the Health Ministry, representatives from several states, development partners and media.