



IMMUNIZATION - India Update

Jan-Mar'24
Spring Issue

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First Post

Importance of reaching out to Zero Dose children

Immunization is a remarkable story in the public health and development trajectory, which has saved millions of lives over the years and continues to do so. Vaccines have played a humongous role in the prevention and control of many communicable diseases and have been directly responsible for the reduction in the number of deaths from several infectious diseases, globally. As vaccines also prevent disability, which can impair children's growth and cognitive development, vaccination ensures that the child not only survives but also flourishes.

At a time when antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has been identified as one of the biggest threats to global health, the importance of vaccination in preventing AMR cannot be disregarded. Immunization not only protects people against drug-resistant infections but also reduces their spread as well as the need for and use of antibiotics, thereby contributing to the battle against antimicrobial resistance. Therefore, it becomes very important to reach out to those children that are designated as Zero Dose (ZD) children. The Immunization Agenda (IA) 2030 has the objective of reducing Zero Dose children by 50% by 2030, globally. To reach out to such children, it is important to identify, where are such children located. Here comes the significance of the 'missed communities, where such children can be found.

Defining Zero Dose Children

"Zero-dose children (ZD) are those who have not received any basic vaccine. For operational and reporting purposes, "zero-dose children" are defined as children who have not received the first-dose of Pentavalent vaccine, till one year of age.

India releases its Zero Dose Implementation Plan

India released its Zero Dose Implementation Plan on 2nd February 2024. The plan aims to reach the missed communities and ensure vaccination of every child with all due vaccines under the Universal Immunization Program within the 1st year of life. This endeavour holds paramount importance, as communities with zero-dose children often harbour a significant number of unvaccinated children, rendering them vulnerable to recurring outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

A national level orientation of the states and other stakeholders on the Zero-Dose implementation plan was held on 2nd February 2024 under the Chairpersonship of Dr. K. K. Tripathy, Joint Secretary-RCH, MoHFW.

The one-day orientation had representation from all the key immunization stakeholders and State Governments of the select 11 states for the Zero Dose Implementation Plan (ZIP) and Immunization partners- UNICEF, WHO, UNDP, JSI, NCCVMRC and ITSU along with Gavi, USAID and BMGF.

(continued on page 7)



Apurva Chandra takes over as Secretary MoHFW

Shri Apurva Chandra, a 1988 batch IAS officer from the Maharashtra cadre, previously Secretary of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, has been appointed as the Secretary of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Shri Apurva Chandra, who holds a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering and a Master's in Structural Engineering from IIT Delhi, has a long history of dealing with industry-related issues in both the Government of Maharashtra and the Government of India.

Before his recent appointment as Health Secretary, Shri Chandra has served as the Special Director General, Defence Acquisition at, the Ministry of Defence, where he played a pivotal role in advancing the agenda of Atma Nirbhar Bharat by promoting greater domestic defence acquisition while ensuring the Armed Forces' readiness. From August 2011 to February 2013, Shri Chandra also served as Joint Secretary in the Union Ministry of HRD, Department of School Education & Literacy, demonstrating his versatility and experience across various sectors of governance.

Source: PIB

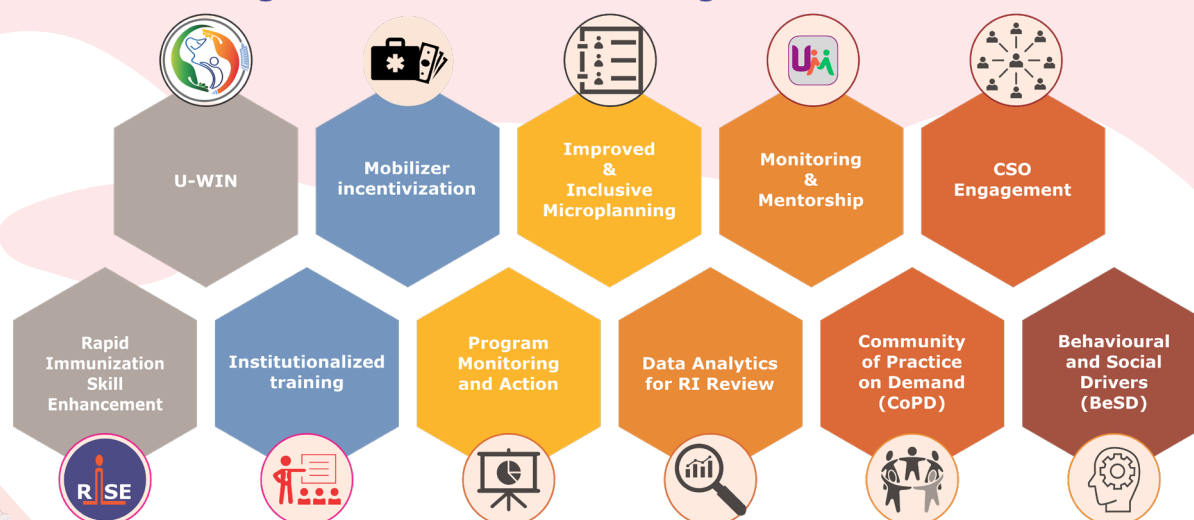
Zero Dose Implementation Plan

India's Zero Dose Implementation Plan, aligned to the global Immunization Agenda 2030 has been developed by the Immunization Division of MoHFW with a team of stakeholders that included representation from various national and international organizations including WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, ITSU, JSI, and Gavi.

The guidelines provide a strategic approach for India to reach out to Zero Dose children to meet the targets. The interventions planned under India's Zero Dose Implementation Plan includes:

- ◆ Nationwide roll out of the country's Electronic Immunization registry- U-WIN,
- ◆ Strengthening service delivery through improved and inclusive microplanning,
- ◆ Enhanced monitoring and mentoring,
- ◆ Emphasizing capacity building by strengthening training under Routine Immunization,
- ◆ Rolling out digital training platform of RISE,
- ◆ Mobilizer incentivization,
- ◆ Enhancing demand and community engagement through establishing Community of Practice on Demand,
- ◆ CSO engagement,
- ◆ Understanding the behaviour social drivers of immunization (BeSD surveys)
- ◆ Strengthening data analytics and review mechanism across the selected districts and states

Reaching Zero-Dose Children through Routine Immunization



Interim Budget, 2024 highlights on Immunization

The interim budget, 2024 presented by the Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman in February has underscored the paramount importance of fortifying immunization initiatives nationwide. To bolster the efficacy and reach of immunization programs, the FM shared that the government will roll out the U-WIN platform expeditiously throughout the country. This cutting-edge platform has been meticulously designed to streamline the management of immunization efforts digitally, particularly in conjunction with the intensified strategies of Mission Indradhanush. With a focus on swift and comprehensive implementation, the rollout of the U-WIN platform will be prioritized to ensure its seamless integration and widespread adoption across the nation. In addition, the FM in recognition of the critical role of preventive healthcare shared that the government is steadfast in its commitment to encouraging and facilitating the vaccination of girls between the age group of 9-14 years, with Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine, to avert the possibility of cervical cancer, which is emerging as a major cause of death from various kinds of cancers, among women.

Meeting of Standing Technical Sub Committee National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI)

The 10th session of the SWG-IVRCB on December 18, 2023, led by Dr. Randeep Guleria, marked a pivotal step in addressing immunization and vaccine research challenges. The primary goal of the working group is to align the national immunization program with global standards, particularly those set by WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE). The meeting focused on critical aspects of vaccine research, safety, and implementation.

Updates from various subgroups highlighted ongoing efforts, such as surveillance for adverse events during pregnancy related to vaccine administration and discussions on studies funded by ICMR. The COVID-19 working group reported on studies examining additional dose performance of WHO-listed vaccines and variant-updated vaccines.

The SWG-IVRCB's top priorities were outlined, which included monitoring and prioritizing vaccine research, establishing a network of laboratories, and strengthening vaccine safety monitoring. Recommendations from the 8th and 9th IVRCB meetings encompassed workshops on vaccine confidence and joint meetings with other working groups. A presentation on a comprehensive study on COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy was also made by Dr Kamlesh Kumar, ITSU, that unveiled varying hesitancy levels across states. The discussion emphasized the importance of gathering regional insights, gender disparity considerations, and human-centric study designs.

Meeting of IEAG-MR FOR MEASLES AND RUBELLA to eliminate MR from the country

A high-powered meeting of the committee on the 6th IEAG-MR for Measles was chaired by Shri Apurv Chandra, Secretary, Health, GoI on 30-31 January to deliberate on the strategies and plan of action to eliminate Measles-Rubella (MR) from the country. Six states including Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh shared the status of MR in the respective states and the efforts undertaken and suggested the way forward.



India receives 'Measles and Rubella Champion' Award for Exemplary Efforts in Disease Prevention

India was honoured with the 'Measles and Rubella Champion' Award for its exceptional efforts in combating these diseases on 6 March 2024. The award, presented by *The Measles and Rubella Partnership*, recognizes India's leadership role in disease prevention. Ambassador Sripriya Ranganathan, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of India, Washington D.C. received the award on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The Measles and Rubella Partnership, consisting of organizations like the American Red Cross, BMGF, GAVI, US CDC, UNF, UNICEF, and WHO, applauded India's commitment to public health. India's proactive vaccination campaigns, innovative strategies, robust surveillance systems, and public-awareness initiatives have significantly reduced measles and rubella cases. The country aims to eliminate these diseases through its Universal Immunization Programme, which includes the MR Vaccine since 2017.

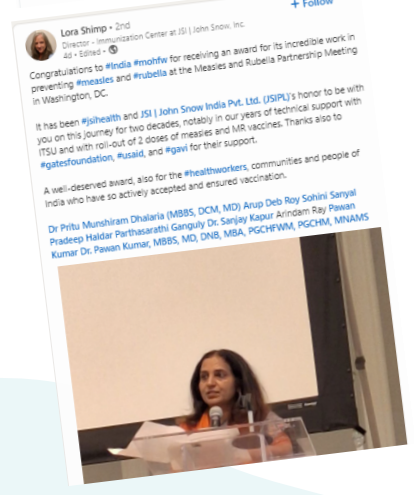


Measles threat amidst caution

The WHO has warned that an estimated 142 million children worldwide shall be at risk of contracting Measles by 2024, with the majority living in low- and medium-income countries.

“What we are worried about is this year we’ve got big gaps in our immunisation programmes and if we don’t fill them really quickly with the vaccine, Measles will just jump into that gap,” Natasha Crowcroft, a Senior Technical Adviser on Measles and Rubella at the WHO, said at her Geneva press briefing on 21 February 2024.

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases in the world, spread when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. The virus remains active and contagious in the air or on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours. Complications can include blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhoea and related dehydration, ear infections, and pneumonia.



Rotavirus Vaccine: Product Switch

The new Rotavirus vaccine (RVV) product- Rotasiil liquid will now be introduced in the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) in eight states (Delhi, Gujrat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan & West Bengal) as soon as the old stock is exhausted. Rotasiil liquid is an oral 2-dose vial with 3ml oral syringe, the package contains one vaccine vial, one adaptor and two syringes. For the new RVV liquid product, only the presentation has changed, while the vaccine schedule, route of administration, vaccine storage, contraindications, and reporting and recording remain the same. Open vial policy does not apply to this vaccine. The advisory includes discarding the RVV vial and syringe, if not used within four hours of the opening. The national-level training of trainers (TOT) for the product switch, led by Dr. Pawan Kumar, Addl. Comm. Immunization and Maternal Health, was conducted online on 8 January 2024. The state ToT and block orientation for the rollout of the Rotasiil is underway with support from WHO and states. The selected states/ UTs will gradually switch to the new product after the currently used RVV product stock gets over.





National AEFI Surveillance & Response Operational Guidelines - 2024 released

The National AEFI Surveillance and Response Operational Guidelines were last updated in 2015. Since then, a lot of progress has been made in the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) as well as in the AEFI surveillance system. The COVID-19 vaccination experience has also brought about changes to the AEFI surveillance system. These changes and updates have been included in the revised National AEFI Surveillance and Response Operational Guidelines - 2024, which was formally released on 10 January 2024.

National-level dissemination of AEFI Surveillance and Response operational Guidelines - 2024 organised in two batches were held on 10-12 January and 13-15 February 2024 at New Delhi. The State immunization officers and the chairpersons of the state AEFI committees from thirty States/UTs attended the dissemination workshop in two batches. Other participants included contributors to the guidelines, members of the national AEFI committee, Signal Review Panel, members of the causality assessment sub-committees for paediatric and COVID-19 vaccine AEFIs, representatives of pharmacovigilance stakeholders and partner agencies such as CDSCO, CDL Kasauli, PvPI, IMA, IAP, TNAI, UNICEF, UNDP, BMGF, JSI, ITSU, WHO-NPSN, NIHFW and consultants of MOHFW.

The workshop aimed to share the updates in AEFI Surveillance, refresh the concepts of AEFI reporting; case investigations, causality assessment processes of serious/severe AEFI cases and to convey the way forward regarding AEFI surveillance in the country.

The regional and state-level training on the new guidelines will be conducted from April onwards with the support of WHO-NPSN network, followed by cascade trainings at the district and block level by states. These guidelines will augment the capacity and capability of our health workforce, thus enabling them to contribute to the strengthened vaccine safety surveillance program.



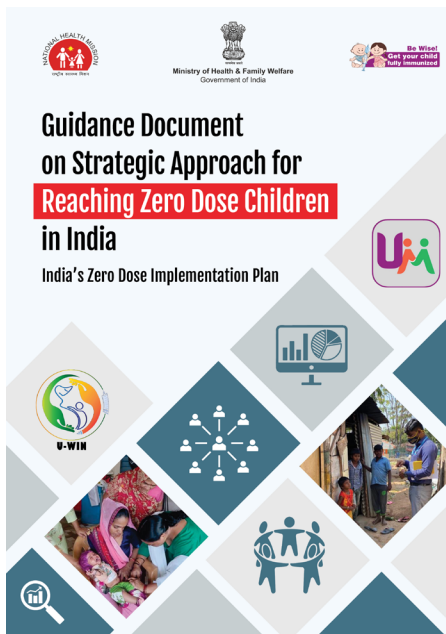


Consultative Workshop on Vaccine Vigilance with Stakeholders in India

AEFI surveillance provides valuable post-marketing safety information and ensures the quality and safety of vaccines to sustain public confidence in vaccines. India is one of the largest manufacturers and exporters of vaccines in the world and also the largest consumer of vaccines globally by volume. Almost 70% of vaccines procured by UN organizations for the immunization programmes in Low- & Middle-Income countries (LMICs) are manufactured and exported from India. UN organizations procure only vaccines which are pre-qualified, one of the conditions being strong vaccine safety surveillance system for the country of manufacture. WHO assesses the country's national regulatory authority (NRA) at regular intervals. In the last NRA Assessment held in February 2017, India achieved maturity level 4 (highest) in vigilance function. States also have an important role to play in this regard because the AEFI cases are reported and investigated by the districts.

A consultative workshop on vaccine vigilance with stakeholders in India was jointly organized by CDSO, WHO India and the AEFI Secretariat, ITSU under the guidance of MoHFW on 19-20 February 2024 at New Delhi. This joint consultative meeting brought together key stakeholders involved in vaccine vigilance and safety monitoring for vaccines in India such as the CDSO, PVPI, CDL Kasauli, AEFI Secretariat (Immunization Division), WHO India, and experts of the National AEFI Committee and Signal Review Panel for vaccines. The meeting was presided over by Dr Pawan Kumar, Additional Commissioner (Immunization) and Dr Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, Drugs Controller General of India, CDSO. The consultative meeting fostered further dialogue and knowledge exchange, thus strengthening cooperation among stakeholders involved in vaccine vigilance. The meeting served as a platform to disseminate recent updates, share success stories, address challenges and identify resources and best practices for strengthening vaccine safety surveillance.





Release of Gavi guidelines for Zero Dose children - 2nd Feb'2024

Under a critical initiative in reaching out to Zero Dose children, 143 districts across 11 states, namely Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland, have been prioritized for reaching out to Zero Dose children. The objective of the Zero Dose Implementation Plan (ZIP) framework is to improve reach & quality of immunization service delivery, implement evidence-based demand generation activities, digitize service delivery processes, and develop data driven action plans and strengthen governance and review mechanisms. The interventions are catalytic and will help in the overall immunization system strengthening.



The Launch of Zero Dose Implementation Plan saw human mascots Tikki and Teeku, bringing much joy and interest to delegates

Strategic IEC/SBCC plans for demand generation

Pacing up with our brand's positioning drawn from the program objectives, it is planned to use mascots Teeki and Teeku to do the talking to stakeholders through various platforms, including IPC, advocacy, social media engagement and other grassroots interventions. The basic crux of the communication pitch will be to impress upon caregivers, the importance of immunizing their children, and how they go about it.

India's Zero Dose Implementation Plan is the last mile approach to ensure that we bring down to "Zero Dose", the existing Zero dose children.

MoHFW Pioneers Digital Health Revolution in Uttar Pradesh

In a remarkable feat of collaboration and determination, MoHFW, the National Health Mission (NHM) and the Uttar Pradesh government, has spearheaded a ground-breaking initiative. Over 10,000 health workers were trained to adeptly utilize the UWIN digital vaccine management platform, propelling immunization services to newer heights in Uttar Pradesh.

The achievement is nothing short of historic, with more than 55,000 users trained in a mere ten days, and an additional 30,000 users trained on the eve of the platform's launch. The swift coordination also extended to creating facilities and users on UWIN, alongside village and ward mapping and data cleaning.

This concerted effort bore fruit immediately, with over 85% of sessions successfully live on the portal on day one, showcasing Uttar Pradesh's remarkable progress. This milestone marks the first step towards a healthier, digitally empowered future, with UNDP India at the forefront of catalysing change. Collaboration with partners like UNICEF, WJCF, JSI, and WHO further underscores the collective commitment to ensuring "Good Health for All."

Success story: Chandigarh

To enhance immunization services in the Union Territory of Chandigarh, the Immunization Department has initiated various activities. These efforts in general were for raising awareness about immunization within the community, addressing AEFI apprehension, enhancing the coverage and quality of immunization services, and vaccinating children who were previously missed or had dropped out of the vaccination schedule. Some of the efforts included the following:

Model Immunization Centre

A Model child-friendly immunization centre with play area, and spacious seating for caregivers has been set up within the Government Multi-speciality hospital located in Chandigarh's sector 16.



Evening Immunization Camps

Monitoring reports of rural and urban areas of Chandigarh and findings of house-to-house survey during the last IMI 5.0, suggested that many children missed their scheduled doses due to the risk of losing their daily wages. To address the issue, special Evening Immunization Camps were organized in these areas from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. To disseminate information about these evening camps in advance throughout the localities, targeted IEC messages, including public announcements from specially decorated e-rickshaws were undertaken. Bullava Tollies featuring school children and volunteers were also deployed to mobilize beneficiaries to attend the evening camps.



Preparing young children to be influencers

The Health Department organized a two-day training session involving teenage school-going students to sensitize them on immunization so that they could be mobilized as influencers in social and behaviour change IPC for the missed-out communities.

Encouraged by the positive response, the Immunization Department is planning to conduct more such camps, aiming to make this a regular and ongoing activity to further improve the immunization coverage within the community.



Madhya Pradesh Tableau on Republic Day Unveils Vision for Measles-Rubella Elimination

On the 75th Republic Day, 2024, the Health Department in the Rajgarh district in Madhya Pradesh used an innovative strategy by unveiling a tableau on the theme of elimination of Measles and Rubella, carrying a powerful message from the Prime Minister and Chief Minister urging citizens to unite in eliminating the vaccine-preventable diseases.

The tableau was ingeniously divided into three themes. The first segment featured an appeal from the leaders, emphasizing the collective responsibility to end the Measles and Rubella menace; the second segment portrayed a vaccination chariot propelled by two horses, symbolizing the Health Department's relentless efforts, and the third part of the tableau highlighted the crucial role of parents in ensuring their children received timely vaccinations.

Dr. Bhakoriya, District Immunization Officer, Rajgarh was the creative mind behind this endeavour. The health department's efforts bore fruit, earning the tableau the first prize in the district and recognition from the health officials from New Delhi and Bhopal. This recognition not only celebrates the artistic endeavour but also underscores the urgency and importance of putting up a united front in achieving a Measles Rubella free future.





Fostering Awareness and Unity: Drawing and Slogan Competition on Vaccination

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Public School in Azad Nagar, Indore, hosted a Drawing and Slogan Competition, which also included a vital talk on vaccination, bringing together over 100 local children and religious leaders. Against the backdrop of a substantial rise in measles cases in the region during the 2023 outbreak, the event aimed at addressing health challenges through creative expression, informative and interactive discussions.

The competition with the *Vaccine Humare Dost, Humein Rakhte Surakshit* (Vaccines, Our Friends, Keeping Us Safe), showcased the artistic talents of the participants, who painted vibrant images and crafted slogans emphasizing the crucial role of vaccination in public health.

Following the competition, a brief yet impactful talk on vaccination was delivered, featuring active participation from local religious leaders. Their involvement underscored the collaborative effort required to dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding MR vaccines within the community.

When difficult terrain and inclement weather do not hamper the enthusiasm of FLWs!

In the serene yet challenging terrain of Himachal Pradesh's Kangra district lies the village of Nalotha. Amidst the biting cold and frosty winds, a heartwarming scene unfolds at the HWC, PHC Kothikohar Block Mahakal, where Mrs. Tanuja, a dedicated female health worker, and Mrs. Sanjay Kumari, an ASHA worker, stand as beacons of commitment and unwavering determination.

Despite the highly inclement weather, these healthcare workers tirelessly conduct routine immunization sessions, ensuring that no one in the remotest corners of the district is left behind. According to their seniors, their dedication is not merely a reflection of their commitment towards their job; but is a testament to the human spirit's resilience and compassion. Both Front Line Workers embody the essence of selflessness, standing as pillars of strength for the health system in the remote corners of Himachal Pradesh.

Source: SIO Himachal Pradesh





Gujarat spruces up its act- Special RI sessions conducted to cover left out and drop out children

A

CDHO review meeting was held under the chairmanship of secretary & Commissioner of Health on 6th Jan 2024 to review special RI sessions. In the meeting, Techo+ (state specific RCH portal) data was analysed and presented. It came to light that a total of 1,21,855 children were born between January 2022 to December 2022, of which 11,483 children were found not Fully Immunized. The emphasis was laid on covering these children who were eligible for the FIC but had not achieved it. To reach out to these children, the state took a focussed initiative to plan a Special RI day on 31st January 2024. Special focus was laid on the Jamnagar Municipal Corporation (JMC) and Jamnagar district, as cumulatively they had the highest number of not fully Immunized Children.

Special Immunization Week- Punjab 2023



Field visit at slum area Lohian, district Jalandhar

The state of Punjab faces large-scale migration of population from other states who come as agriculture and industrial labourers. Rapid urbanization of big cities often poses a challenge in imparting immunization services, especially to vulnerable population. Large Measles outbreaks were reported in initial months of January, February, March 2023 in various districts of Punjab. Appropriate public health response was initiated to tackle these outbreaks. Also, to prevent further spread, the state planned four rounds of special immunization weeks all over Punjab in the months of February, March, April, and June 2023. During this special drive efforts were afoot to cover left out and drop out children up to 5 years of age. The activity was monitored by state observers from the state and WHO NPSP monitors.

Rajasthan opens 11 model immunization centres



To enhance and streamline the quality immunization services specifically in urban areas with focus on efficiency, accessibility and effectiveness, the Rajasthan government, with technical assistance from UNICEF has developed 11 model immunization in the state to overcome the challenges of quality immunization services and improve the acceptance of public health care delivery system among the urban population. Christened AAPNO TIKAKARAN KENDRA, these Model immunization centres are being developed as a “Centre of Excellence” by providing quality immunization services by demonstrating all best practices related to Immunization and cold chain & vaccine management, recording/ reporting, and injection safety. These centres would also be used for cross-learning for other facilities and on-site trainings for medical officers/ ANMs/ GNMs.

These centres provide child friendly ambience adorned with colourful paintings, toys, and child friendly furniture for easing the process of vaccination. The waiting area equipped with essential amenities like potable drinking water, AC, adequate sitting arrangement for breast feeding corner with privacy etc. The waiting area also showcase IEC material on various national and state government schemes. This initiative reflects the government’s commitment to safeguarding child health and promoting immunization.



ITSU at IAPSMCON 2024

The 51st Annual National Conference of the Indian Association of Preventive and Social Medicine (IAPSMCON 2024) took place at Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore, from February 8th to 10th.

Themed, *Transformations for achieving Sustainable Development Goals: Innovate, Integrate, and Implement*; the conference focused on collaborative efforts for a sustainable future by 2030. Dr. Pawan Kumar, Additional Commissioner, Immunization, presented India's UIP evolution and innovations. Dr. Narendar Kumar Sinha, SIO, Bihar shared Bihar's innovative approaches, emphasizing their impact. Dr. Sanjay Kapur, Managing Director, JSIPL, chaired the Plenary Session, discussing the leveraging of innovations for UIP strengthening on challenges and solutions to strengthen UIP, ITSU had set up an exhibition stall to raise awareness and foster engagement on critical public health issues related to immunization.



An Inspiring Zero-Dose Learning Agenda: Cross-Country Workshop in Istanbul

Gathering in Istanbul, Turkey, forty-five participants from six countries embarked on an inspiring journey to advance Zero-Dose Learning Agenda initiatives in immunization. Key highlights included unveiling a comprehensive roadmap for influencing policies, fostering cross-country collaboration, emphasizing M&E and continuous learning, integrating gender-inclusive approaches, and forging impactful partnerships with Ministries of Health and organizations like Gavi. The workshop showcased the power of collective learning and solidarity in pursuit of health equity, underscoring the commitment to drive impactful interventions across focus countries. This collaborative effort marks a significant step forward in the global fight against vaccine-preventable diseases.

EPI completes 50 eventful years in its Immunization journey

The expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) an initiative launched by the World Health Organization in 1974, completes half a century, which “provides a pivotal occasion to celebrate the programme’s achievements, highlight its impact on lives saved, and catalyse renewed efforts to strengthen routine immunization initiatives”, as per WHO website story.

EPI, it reiterates, stands as a global endeavour “to ensure equitable access to life-saving vaccines for every child, regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status.”

WHO now lists 13 vaccines (antigens), that include Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG), diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib), Hepatitis B (HepB), Polio, measles, rubella, pneumococcal disease (PNC), rotavirus (Rota), human papillomavirus (HPV), and COVID-19 (for adults).

There are also vaccines recommended for particular settings, including Yellow fever, Meningitis, Japanese encephalitis (JE), Cholera. This comprehensive array of vaccines underlines the EPI’s commitment “to safeguarding individuals from infancy through adulthood, embodying a holistic approach to health and well-being.”

Source: 50th anniversary of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) (who.int)

Measles-Rubella a cause of worry in high-income countries also

According to a BBC report, pop-up clinic in Coventry (UK) are being hosted at schools for MR vaccine uptake. The administration has included all secondary schools and 21 primary schools because the West Midlands was experiencing the highest number of measles cases since the mid-1990s.

(<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1e1ev8gn9jo>)

A Turning Point: Cameroon rolls out world's first malaria vaccine program for children

Cameroon launched the RTS,S malaria vaccine into its routine national immunization services, becoming the first country to do so outside the malaria vaccine pilot program that was carried out in Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi. The introduction comes as efforts gather pace to scale up vaccination against the disease in high-risk African areas.

Cameroon will be the first country to routinely give children a new malaria vaccine as the shots are rolled out in Africa. The mosquito-borne disease kills more than 600,000 people a year, mainly in Africa, according to the World Health Organization. This disease remains the primary cause of consultations and hospitalizations in Cameroon, one of the 11 countries carrying 70% of the global malaria burden. Its impact is particularly felt among children aged under five and pregnant women.

WHO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, UNICEF, and other partners are working closely with the African countries in introducing the malaria vaccine to ensure delivery and successful rollout.

Source: WHO AFRO

Comprehensive UIP Review of NUHM Cities by ITSU- MoHFW

Eight NUHM cities have been identified across 8 states based on the geographical, demographical and administrative structure of the cities for the Comprehensive UIP Review, the cities include,

- ◆ Raipur (Chhattisgarh)
- ◆ Udaipur (Rajasthan)
- ◆ Amritsar (Punjab)
- ◆ Indore (Madhya Pradesh)
- ◆ Thane (Maharashtra)
- ◆ Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh)
- ◆ Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala)
- ◆ Chennai (Tamil Nadu)

Schedule of CUIP Review:

The Review was scheduled in the months of February and March 2024 in three phases viz:

- ◆ 1st Phase_ (19-23 February 2024- Raipur (Chhattisgarh) and Udaipur (Rajasthan)
- ◆ 2nd Phase- 04-08 March 2024- Amritsar (Punjab), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Thane (Maharashtra)
- ◆ 3rd Phase- 18-22 March 2024- Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala), Chennai (Tamil Nadu)

After completion of the Comprehensive UIP Review of NUHM Cities, the report will be prepared with recommendations to improve Immunization Coverage and health system strengthening in urban areas.

In retrospect, The Universal Immunization Program (UIP) in India has successfully vaccinated more than 26.7 million children and 30 million pregnant women annually through 12 million Routine Immunization sessions. As per the National Family Health Survey-51, the Full Immunization Coverage (FIC)² improved from 62% in 2015-16 to 76.4% in 2019-21. The improvement in immunization however hasn't been uniform in urban and rural contexts. For the first time in NFHS-5, the FIC in urban areas has been less than the overall national and rural average with 75.5 % in urban areas as compared to 76.8% in rural counterparts. Before this, FIC for urban areas was always higher than the rural and total national average.

Another finding that reflects the challenges in urban areas is the pace of progress from NFHS-4 to NFHS-5 – while the rural regions recorded a 15.5 % increase in the FIC, only an 11.6 % increase was reported in urban regions. This gap was even more pronounced in the time frame from NFHS 3 to 4 – with 37% improvement in FIC in rural areas whereas only 10% in urban areas. According to Census 2011, the urban population (~37%) constitutes approximately 31% (~one-third) of the national population. The urban population is complex owing to diverse and vulnerable populations.



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Radio4child awards

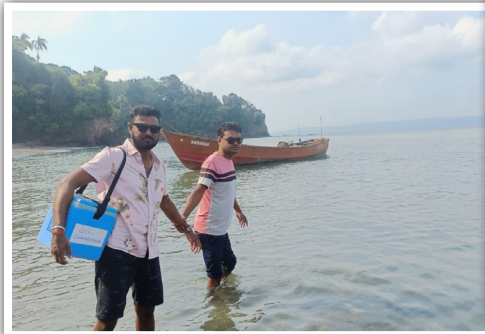
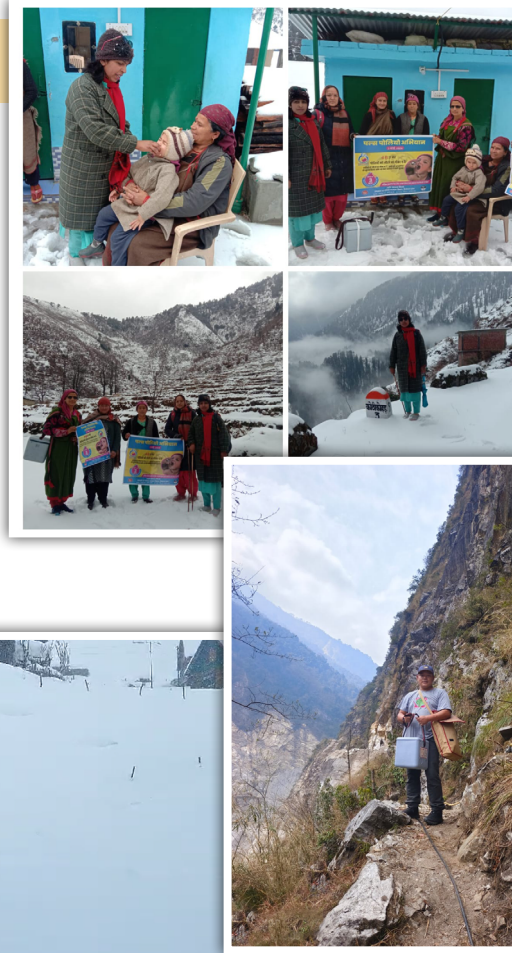
UNICEF India presented the 5th edition of Radio4child awards to 22 radio professionals from across 20 states. The awardees received their awards from well known cine actor Ayushman Khurana, who currently happens to be UNICEF ambassador. Entries came from professionals representing both public and private sector radio stations, besides from community radio.

Radio4child partnership creates awareness on critical issues for children on immunization, health, and safety during their early years.

Polio: National Immunization Day 2024

India, declared polio-free for over 12 years, remains vigilant against the global threat of wild poliovirus. To maintain this status and prevent importation, National Immunization Day (NID) was conducted nationwide on March 3, 2024, in 29 states and UTs, targeting children aged 0 to 5 with bivalent Oral Polio Vaccine (bOPV). This decision aligns with recommendations from the India Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on Polio. Preparations for this campaign focused on updated micro plans, Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns, and capacity building of healthcare providers, with special attention to the migrant population.

This also included high-quality preparedness and monitoring during NID, a crucial aspect of the success of the campaign. Twenty-nine states/Union territories participated in this round of polio. Together, these efforts aim to uphold India's polio-free status and protect children from this preventable disease.



Adult BCG vaccination study launched to accelerate effort to end TB by 2025

The government launched a groundbreaking BCG revaccination program aimed at high-risk groups to combat tuberculosis. Twenty-three states have enthusiastically agreed to participate in this innovative initiative. The study will focus on individuals above 50, prior TB patients, underweight adults, diabetics, smokers, and alcohol consumers. Its first phase will commence in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Recent research by St. John's Research Institute, Bengaluru, suggests promising immunogenic responses to BCG revaccination in adults. Despite differing global findings, an expert committee, including Dr Soumya Swaminathan, has recommended further trials to evaluate its efficacy across various demographics. The study aims to expedite implementation and monitor TB incidence trends for informed decision-making, utilizing a strategic district-based approach. This bold initiative underscores the government's commitment to combat tuberculosis on a nationwide scale.



Source: Adapted from Media Story

Grassroots efforts at addressing MR elimination

In the Kshipra sub-centre in the Dewas District of Madhya Pradesh, a triumphant tale unfolds in the relentless pursuit of eradicating Measles Rubella (MR). At the forefront of this innovative endeavour is ANM Nilima Parmar, who has leveraged the rich tapestry of local traditions to ingeniously develop a surveillance system within schools and temples, recognizing them as focal points of community activity. Understanding the cultural significance of seeking blessings during times of measles, Nilima strategically targeted Sheetla Mata temple, enlisting the support of a local liaison to alert her of any such visits for rituals by the locals. This helped her in targeting such households, where she or an ASHA would visit to raise awareness about the vaccine.

Under the banner of “Jo na pahunche hum tak, hum pahunchei unn tak” (If they do not reach us, we will reach them), Nilima orchestrated awareness rallies, fostering a spirit of collective responsibility. The synergy between ANM, ASHA workers, and community members became the bedrock of success, ensuring no stone was left unturned in the quest for MR eradication.

Dr Santosh Shukla, Director, Immunization, effusive in praise, heralds Nilima Parmar’s leadership, lauding her for a robust disease information system. With plans laid for sustained vigilance over the next three years, the centre envisions a future where every village replicates the story.

Influencer campaign on HPV goes awry!

Poonam Pandey, model, and entertainer faked her death for two days in February 24 to bring about awareness on cervical cancer! This brought about a storm of sorts in the media on the lack of sensitivity about cervical cancer that claims thousands of lives each year. Gauging the unexpected negative response, Harshil Karia, co-founder of Schbang, the agency behind Pandey’s cervical cancer campaign said, “We got that wrong. It is not a situation that we are proud of,” as quoted by Brand Equity, The Economic Times.

Manisha Kapoor, CEO, and Secretary General of the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), an industry body on self-regulation of commercial content reacted thus: “The slew of promotions relying on fakeness to draw eyeballs was already becoming a bit of an irritant. The latest episode of an obscure celebrity faking her death to sell vaccines could just be that last proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back.” Incidentally, ASCI has a code of regulation for social media influencers. While the controversy raged, MSD, The Indian affiliate of the US Pharma giant Merck has terminated the contract of the creative agency involved in this insensitive publicity campaign.

There is a lesson in this for the creative minds and strategists that the issues of public health are serious enough to be taken lightly!

India is ageing!

UNFPA’s *India Ageing Report, 2023* released recently has some interesting data to share:

- ◆ India’s elderly population is growing rapidly, with a decadal growth rate of 41%.
- ◆ By 2050, over 20% of India’s population will be elderly.
- ◆ The elderly population in India will surpass the **population of children (0 to 15 years old)** by 2046.
- ◆ The population of people aged **80+ years is expected to increase by around 279%** between 2022 and 2050.

What does it mean for the health care system? The report has made many suggestions, learning from COVID-19, including quick access to healthcare and, need for extending social security. In its Immunization Agenda-2030, the WHO has underscored the need and importance of life course vaccination through its vision statement: ***A world where everyone, at every age fully vaccinates for good health and wellbeing.***



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Comprehensive UIP Review of NUHM Cities by ITSU- MoHFW

Under the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), there are 1068 NUHM cities identified. The Immunization Technical Support Unit – MoHFW has planned a Comprehensive Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) Review for the NUHM Cities. The Comprehensive UIP review aimed to assess the Immunization Delivery system, its strengths, weaknesses, and bottlenecks, and innovations/initiatives by states to improve Immunization coverage in Urban areas so that no child is left unvaccinated. The major key thematic areas identified included program planning and implementation including AEFI, demand generation, logistics, and supply chain management, monitoring, and evaluation.

Details findings and insights will be shared in the next issue of the Newsletter.



Publications

Two papers from ITSU were accepted for the National Public Health India Conference (NHPICON-2024) Conference at the National Centre for Disease Control, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (NCDC-MoHFW), New Delhi held from 23rd to 25th February.



- ◆ “Exploring Landscape of Measles Vaccination Coverage: A Step Towards Measles Elimination Goal in India”.
- ◆ “Unveiling the Path to Improved Immunization Coverage in India: Exploring Zero Dose and Partially Immunized Children as Catalysts for Progress”

Social Media Initiatives



Media Echo

- ◆ मुख्यमंत्री ने नन्हें बच्चों को पिलाई दो बूंद जिंदगी की, राष्ट्रीय सघन पल्स पोलियो अभियान का किया शुभारम्भ। [Read More](#)
- ◆ गरियाबंद में राष्ट्रीय पल्स पोलियो अभियान की शुरुआत: कलेक्टर ने अपनी बेटी को पिलाई ड्रॉप, जिले में 90 हजार बच्चों को पिलाई जाएगी दवा। [Read More](#)
- ◆ Govt to focus on vaccination against cervical cancer, announces Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. [Read More](#)
- ◆ India is the world leader in vaccines, has done great job in vaccinating children: Bill Gates. [Read More](#)
- ◆ India gets its own HPV vaccine to stop 70,000 women dying of cervical cancer a year. [Read More](#)
- ◆ Kerala witnesses mumps outbreak: 190 cases in a day. [Read More](#)
- ◆ Govt to focus on vaccination against cervical cancer, announces Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. [Read More](#)
- ◆ Rapid measles outbreak response critical to protect millions of vulnerable children. [Read More](#)
- ◆ India receives 'Measles and Rubella Champion' Award for Exemplary Efforts in Measles and Rubella Disease Prevention. [Read More](#)

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