

President launches pulse polio immunisation program 2014

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The President of India, Mr Pranab Mukherjee launched the Pulse Polio Immunization program 2014 at the Rashtrapti Bhavan, today in the presence of the Union Health Minister, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad and MoS (Health), Smt. Santosh Chowdhary. Six small children were administered polio vaccine by the President of India.

Azad pointed out that in this round more than 17 crore children will be vaccinated. Also, 23 lakh frontline workers and volunteers will fan out in every nook and corner of the country to reach every child up to five years of age so that we maintain high immunity of our children against the polio virus. Besides setting up 102 polio vaccination posts along international borders, it has been decided that any case of wild polio shall be treated as public health emergency, the Health Minister added.

Sh Azad, addressing the gathering, stated that India has not recorded even a single case of wild polio in the last three years, which is a historic achievement. Narrating the journey India took to arrive to this feat, he said that as poliovirus transmission in some parts of the country was intense, experts believed that India was the most difficult place in the world to stop polio. India however, accepted the challenge, he pointed out. In 2010, India launched bivalent oral polio vaccine with the President of India administering the first drops of the new vaccine to the children. Intense effort results in covering all children, no matter where they were. This also saw the lakhs of vaccinators braving difficult conditions to reach children in the remotest parts of the country, the Health Minister stated.

The Health Minister stated that the program had the immense support of the religious and opinion leaders as well as social mobilizers who won over resistance through effective communication of benefits of polio vaccination. Community ownership of the program was fostered. The managers carefully mapped high risk habitations, particularly mobile and migrant populations, so that all under-served populations were reached, the Minister pointed out. He added, that this required close monitoring and door to door vaccination so that no household was missed. Children were immunized on trains, in buses, in melas, in religious congregations and along the international borders. This was done again and again with never-say-die

spirit, Sh Azad added. This resulted in coverage rates of unprecedented levels.

The Health Minister noted that the response to the last polio case in Howrah in West Bengal was razor sharp and is globally cited as the fastest response time. The Ministry stepped up surveillance so as not to miss even a single case of polio, he added.

Sh Azad stated that from a position when India had more than 2 lakh children getting crippled by polio each year, we have come to a time in history where not a single child has suffered wild polio for the last three years. This is monumental victory- and has paved the way for India's formal certification by WHO as a polio free nation, he informed. He thanked various partners such as the State governments, lakhs of supervisor and vaccinators, volunteers, WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International, World Bank, USAID, DFID and many more who have made this achievement possible.

Also present at the occasion were senior officials from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, representatives from international partners such as WHO and DFID and media.