

Slum kids left alone to deal with pneumonia

UT launches vaccination scheme with fanfare, then forgets it

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EVEN AS international child health groups cried themselves hoarse about the threat posed by Pneumonia, the UT Health Department chose to evade the issue of the provision of the Hib vaccine for slum children. The scheme was launched under the 11th five year plan two years ago and has gone nowhere so far.

Two years back, the UT Administration asked the School of Public Health (SPH), PGI to prepare a proposal on "Improving Monitorable Reproductive and Child Indicators in Chandigarh".

After a long research, SPH submitted the proposal, strongly recommending the introduction of the Hib vaccination free of cost among slum children, who are at an increased risk of developing severe pneumonia. Risk factors for slum children include, poor nutrition, indoor air pollution and crowded living conditions.

The SPH even worked out the cost, which came to Rs 500 for three doses. The survey found 7,500 children eligible under the scheme and the total cost was calculated to Rs 37.5 lakh per year. Estimates pegged the total cost to Rs 1.87 crore for the entire Five Year Plan.

The SPH proposal was accepted by the UT Administration. It was even formally launched and widely publicised in the media,

DEADLY KILLER

- According to a UNICEF/WHO report, Pneumonia kills two million children across the world, more than deaths from AIDS, malaria and measles.
- In India pneumonia kills 4.10 lakh children under the age of 5 every year
- The most common causes of severe pneumonia among children in India are bacteria: pneumococcus (*Streptococcus pneumoniae*) and Hib (*Haemophilus Influenzae* type b).
- The low-cost techniques includes exclusive breast feeding for six months, ensuring good nutrition, reducing indoor air pollution, using antibiotics, washing hands and preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Nearly one fourth of the victims are from India. According experts, this part of the country has a substantial share in child pneumonia deaths.

"Pneumonia also causes severe financial difficulties and emotional burden for families and communities and contributes to the cycle of poverty," a senior faculty member at SPH, PGI,

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