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BY DEV KUMAR SUNUWAR

KATHMANDU, April 20 - In its bid to bring down child mortality rate, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is planning to vaccinate all children under five years of age against pneumonia and meningitis from June/July. The first phase of the campaign was launched in 25 districts of western and far-western regions on April 14.

The ministry aims to expand the campaign to all the districts from the fiscal year beginning June/July, according to Dr Shayam Raj Upreti, director at the child health division under the MoH.

The Haemophilus influenzae type B (HiB) campaign will be part of the government's ongoing national immunisation programmes.

The government woke up after a survey showed that over 11,000 children under five years of age were dying of pneumonia and meningitis every year.

Two bacteria, namely Haemophilus influenzae Type B (HiB) and Pneumococcus, cause pneumonia and meningitis. "In Nepal, thousands of children die of HiB disease every year. Moreover, the survivors of HiB meningitis are often permanently disabled -- deafened, paralysed or brain damaged," said Dr Shayam Raj Upreti, director at the child health division under the MoH.

According to MoH statistics, diseases kill 58,000 children under five years of age annually. Of them, 4,000 die of HiB. The new combination vaccine will protect children against HiB and five other deadly diseases, namely diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, Hepatitis B and BCG.

HiB campaign, so far the most expensive vaccination drive incorporated in the government's national immunisation programme (Each vaccine costs around Rs 300), will also make it easier for health workers to reach out to children across the country at a time when the government's immunisation campaign is underway.


"After introducing this (HiB) vaccine, we became able to bring down the child mortality rate from 91 in 2001 to 61 in 2006. We hope to be able to bring down the mortality rate to 54 by 2015, which is Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target," added Dr. Upreti.

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