

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RESEARCH**

**RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 900
TO BE ANSWERED ON 03RD DECEMBER, 2024**

RESEARCH EFFORTS FOCUSED ON NEW-BORN BABIES AND CHILD HEALTH

900. DR. AJEET MADHAVRAO GOPCHADE:

Will the Minister of **HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE** be pleased to state:

- (a) the steps Government has taken, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and State Governments, to prioritize and improve research efforts focused on new-born babies and child health, if so, the details thereof for each state;
- (b) whether Government is aware that newborn fatalities happen in low-and middle-income families, if so, what actions have been taken in response thereto; and
- (c) the steps Government has taken to arrange a special meeting with relevant stakeholders and National/State Pediatric Associations to discuss a roadmap for prioritizing research efforts focused on new-born babies and child health?

ANSWER

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
(SHRI PRATAPRAO JADHAV)**

(a): The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has informed that neonatal mortality has been identified as a national health research priority and it has undertaken several key research projects on health of the newborns and children.

Among its prominent initiatives, ICMR has undertaken “Sankalp” Program for strengthening, implementing and monitoring the target of achieving Single-digit Neonatal Mortality. It has also undertaken Research to develop an optimized model of comprehensive intervention package and delivery strategies to reduce stillbirth, and a Project on building evidence and designing solutions to prevent stillbirths in India - a collaborative approach to analyze pregnancy cohorts in India.

ICMR, through its Centres for Advanced Research has undertaken multiple implementation research projects. One of its studies recently completed in August 2024 demonstrated that the mutation profiles of childhood respiratory diseases specific to Indian population are different as compared to western data. It also did important studies on pediatric kidney diseases and intravenous antibiotics in the treatment of uncomplicated neonatal bacterial sepsis. ICMR has also undertaken First Thousand Days of life project with an aim to design, implement, and optimize a model to provide comprehensive care across the first 1000 days of life.

National Institute for Research in Reproductive and Child Health (NIRRCH), an Institute of ICMR, has undertaken a multicentric study on newborn sickle screening program across seven sites in six states of

India (Rajasthan, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat) having a high prevalence of Sickle Cell Disease since 2019. ICMR-NIRRH has also undertaken other studies including a study on population-based birth defect surveillance in linkage with Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) programme in rural blocks of Palghar district in Maharashtra in collaboration with state health system.

Besides, several other projects for the health of newborns and children have been funded by ICMR under its intermediate, small and ad-hoc grants spread over various states.

(b): The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) supports all States/UTs in implementation of Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child, Adolescent Health and Nutrition (RMNCAH + N) strategy under National Health Mission (NHM) based on the Annual Program Implementation Plan (APIP) submitted by States / UTs. All the interventions to improve newborn and child health outcomes are implemented universally in all the States/UTs with special focus on tribal and marginalized population without any discrimination on gender, caste and religion. Some of the important interventions to improve newborn and child survival all across the country, are:

(1) Facility Based New-born Care: Special New-born Care Units (SNCUs) are established at District Hospital and Medical College level and New-born Stabilization Units (NBSUs) are established at First Referral Units (FRUs)/ Community Health Centres (CHCs) for care of sick and small babies.

(2) Mother-Newborn Care Units (MNCUs) are established with the aim of 'zero separation' of mother and baby, including small and sick babies who require newborn care.

(3) Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) is implemented at facility and community level for low birth weight/ pre-term babies that include early and prolonged skin-to-skin contact with the mother or family members and exclusive and frequent breastfeeding.

(4) Community Based care of New-born and Young Children: Under Home Based New-born Care (HBNC) and Home-Based Care of Young Children (HBYC) program, home visits are performed by ASHAs to improve child rearing practices and to identify sick new-born and young children in the community.

(5) Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK): Sick infant up to one year of age is entitled to free treatment in public health institutions along with the provision of free transport, diagnostics, medicines, blood and consumables.

(6) Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) is implemented to provide vaccination to children against life threatening diseases.

(7) Mothers' Absolute Affection (MAA): Early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding for first six months and appropriate Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices are promoted under Mothers' Absolute Affection (MAA).

(8) Social Awareness and Actions to Neutralize Pneumonia Successfully (SAANS) is an initiative continuing since 2019 for reduction of childhood morbidity and mortality due to Pneumonia.

(9) STOP Diarrhoea initiative is being implemented for promoting use of ORS and Zinc and for reducing morbidity and mortality due to childhood diarrhoea.

(10) Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK): Children from 0 to 18 years of age are screened for 32 health conditions (i.e. Diseases, Deficiencies, Defects and Developmental delay) under Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) to improve child survival. District Early Intervention Centres (DEICs) at district health facility level are established for confirmation and management of children screened under RBSK.

(11) Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres (NRCs) are established at public health facilities to treat and manage the children with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) admitted with medical complications.

(12) Anaemia Mukht Bharat (AMB) strategy as a part of POSHAN Abhiyan aims to strengthen the existing mechanisms and foster newer strategies to tackle anaemia which include testing & treatment of anaemia in school-going adolescents & pregnant women, addressing non-nutritional causes of anaemia and a comprehensive communication strategy.

(13) Capacity Building: Several capacity building programs of health care providers are taken up for improving child survival and health outcomes. These include recently updated packages, released in 2023: (a) Revised training package of Facility based Integrated Management of Neonatal & Childhood Illness (F-IMNCI) and Integrated Management of Neonatal & Childhood Illness (IMNCI), (b) Revised training package of Facility Based Newborn Care (FBNC).

(c): ICMR regularly organizes meetings and consultations with relevant stakeholders including National/State Pediatric Associations, non-profit organizations, national and international collaborators on newborn and child health research. On 15-16th April 2024, ICMR organized a Multi-Stakeholder Coalition Meeting - Mission Single Digit Neonatal Mortality Rate (NMR) under the Sankalp Project. Various Pediatric associations- NNF, IAP, maternal health associations-FOGSI, Midwifery association, Organizations working for maternal and neonatal health-UNICEF, WHO, JHPIEGO, USAID, etc., self help groups and community based organizations were invited in the meeting. Various sessions of panel discussions were held related to existing policies and future needs in implementation of research, Health system challenges, solutions to improve the implementation of evidence-based maternal-newborn and good practices across the mother-child continuum of care.

A Webinar was conducted on 4th July 2024, by ICMR on "Strengthening Intramural Research Program (Reproductive, Maternal, Child Health, and Nutrition)". The priority areas identified were - Neonatal sepsis, Implementation research on key newborn and child health interventions, HIE (Hypoxic Ischaemic Encephalopathy), SGA (Small for Gestational Age) babies.
