

Seventy percent children anaemic, government to take steps

Concerned by the whopping number of children in the age group of six to 59 months suffering from anaemia, the government is taking several steps, including providing supplementary and fortifying food and vitamins supplements to rectify the malady.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Anbumani Ramadoss told Lok Sabha Wednesday that 69.5 percent of children in the age group of six to 59 months are suffering from anaemia of which 63 percent are in the urban areas and 71.5 percent in the rural areas.

'Anaemia is a multifaceted problem. The important reasons for widespread anaemia are inadequate intake and absorption of iron from cereal based diet, inadequate consumption of green leafy vegetables and citrus fruits,' he said.

He also pointed out that poverty and illiteracy are the contributory factors leading to anaemia among children.

Pointing out that the government is highly concerned with the matter, he said Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently held a meeting to chalk out a strategy to deal with the problem.

The ministers for women and child development, human resource development, rural development and health attended the meeting, he said.

'We have decided to introduce fortified food in mid-day meals,' he said.

He said under the reproductive and child health programme (RCH-11) the government is providing iron and folic acid tablets to all pregnant and lactating women and preschool children for anaemia control.

'Now it has been decided that children six months to five years would be given 20 mg iron and 100 mcg folic acid supplement in liquid form,' he said.

Children in the age group of six to 10 years would be provided with 30 mg iron and 250 mcg of folic acid, while adolescents in the age group of 11-18 years would receive the same dose as adults, he added.

'Children in the age group 0-6 years receive supplementary nutrition. Supplementary food is also provided through national programme of nutritional support to primary education,' he added.

The minister said they are planning to provide vitamin A supplements to children till five years of age. Also, health ministry has launched a pilot project on fortification of micronutrients with flour and oil.

Ramadoss said the government is planning a huge awareness campaign on breast-feeding and the ASHAs or the women health volunteers have been asked to inform the villagers to use locally nutritious food.

Speaker Somnath Chatterjee said there should be regular monitoring of the programme.

To this, Ramadoss replied: 'We have decided to conduct frequent surveys to see how effective the programmes are. We want to make an anaemia-free society.'

He said even children born in affluent families are anaemic. 'About 56 percent of children in affluent families are anaemic.'

Ranjita Ranjan, a MP from Bihar, pointed out that fruits and vegetables have chemical contents. Ramadoss replied that his ministry would verify this.

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