

Forty percent of Indian kids suffer zinc deficiency

Nearly 40 percent of Indian children suffer from zinc deficiency, a reason behind the whopping malnutrition in India, a top government official said Tuesday.

'We know that zinc deficiency among children of poor and middle-class families is quite high. This is the problem and the government is trying to give zinc supplement to children,' said M.K. Bhan, secretary in the department of biotechnology.

He said the government is trying to provide zinc supplement in the form of tablets in areas where diarrhea and its related deaths are quite high.

'Some states like Orissa are running pilot projects on this as part of the central government's effort to improve the nutrition situation in the country,' said Bhan while releasing the Lancet journal series on maternal and child under-nutrition here.

Zinc deficiency is typically the result of inadequate dietary intake and primarily found among people who are largely vegetarians.

Physiological states that require increased zinc include periods of growth in infants and children as well as in mothers during pregnancy. Zinc deficiency during pregnancy can negatively affect both the mother and the foetus.

The Lancet series mentioned that 51 percent of Indian children under five years of age are stunted and thus constitute 34 percent of such children worldwide.

Anaemia affects 79 percent of the children from the lower economic background. The research mirrors trends found in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) that indicate some improvements in the nutritional status of young children in several states.

However, there are widespread nutritional deficiencies and little change in the percentage of children who are underweight. Though the findings are nothing new, the series reinforces the state of Indian healthcare.

'Despite economic growth, maternal and child under-nutrition remains a persistent social and economic concern in India,' Bhan added.

Robert Black, a leading scientist with the US-based Johns Hopkins university, who is involved with the series, said: 'Nutrition in first two years of life is important and critical for child health.'

'Basic nutrition programmes can prevent 25 percent of child deaths in the world's poorest countries,' he said.

(© IANS / India eNews)