

India still lags behind in routine immunization programme: WHO-UNICEF report

In 2017, an estimated 19.9 million infants worldwide were not reached with routine services such as three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP vaccine). Around 60 per cent of these children live in 10 countries — Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and South Africa.

This according to the most recent World Health Organisation and UNICEF immunization estimates released this week.

The report further noted that global vaccination coverage — the proportion of the world's children who receive recommended vaccines — has remained the same over the past few years. It added that since 2015, the percentage of children who received their full course of three dose diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3) routine immunizations is sustained at 85 per cent (116.2 million infants).

Although global immunization coverage with DTP3 remains at 85 per cent, it is important to highlight that an additional 4.6 million infants have been vaccinated globally in 2017 compared to 2010, due to global population growth.

The report highlighted that more concerted efforts needed to reach universal immunization coverage.

As per the figures released — an estimated 20 million additional children need to be vaccinated with DTP3; 45 million additional children need to be vaccinated with a second dose of measles vaccine and 76 million more children need to be vaccinated with 3 doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine.

“Of the 19.9 million infants who are not fully vaccinated with DTP3, almost 8 million (40 per cent) live in fragile or humanitarian settings, including countries affected by conflict. And about 5.6 million of them live in just three countries — Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan — where access to routine immunization services is critical to achieving and sustaining polio eradication.

Meanwhile, newly available vaccines are being added as part of the life-saving vaccination package — such as those to protect against meningitis, malaria and even Ebola. Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common viral infection of the reproductive tract, and can cause cervical cancer, other types of cancer, and genital warts in both men and women. In 2017, the HPV vaccine was introduced in 80 countries.

“On the other hand, vaccines to prevent against major killers of children such as rotavirus, a disease that causes severe childhood diarrhoea, and pneumonia have been around for over a decade. But the use of rotavirus and pneumococcal conjugate vaccines (PCV) is lagging behind. In 2017, global coverage was only 28 per cent for rotavirus and 44 per cent for PCV. Vaccination against both these diseases has the potential to substantially reduce deaths of children under 5 years of age, a target of the Sustainable Development Goals,” noted the report.

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