

Immunization side-effects claimed 133 children's lives in 2011

NEW DELHI: Around 133 children died last year due to [adverse effects following immunization](#) (AEFI).

Minister of state for health [Sudip Bandhopadhyay](#) admitted on Friday said that six of those deaths occurred due to programme errors, while four others died of vaccine reaction.

Around 56 deaths have been termed "unclassifiable", and 67 were termed "coincidental."

In comparison, 138 children had died of [AEFI](#) in 2010. The death figures till last year had persistently risen. There were 111 and 116 deaths in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

India has one of the world's largest universal immunization programme, targeting 2.6 crore children who are born every year. Each child is given four vaccinations in addition to vaccinations at birth. About 90 lakh vaccination sessions are held every year, where more than 25 crore vaccine doses of seven antigens like diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, [measles](#), BCG, [Hepatitis B](#) and polio are administered.

Bandhopadhyay said, "AEFI including deaths are being reported due to strengthening of the AEFI system. AEFI are monitored by the government to build confidence of the community in the immunization programme as all serious AEFI including deaths following immunization may not be related to vaccination."

Talking about measures being taken up by the ministry, the minister said, "guidelines for AEFI were revised in 2010 and have been disseminated. Training of officers associated with immunization have been carried out so that AEFI deaths due to programmatic errors are minimized."

Vaccination programme is carried out both in health facilities and door-to-door outreach sessions in every village.

Booster doses are also given at the age of one and a half years and five years. Besides, supplementary immunization activities are carried out periodically.

The ministry called vaccination one of the most cost-effective public health interventions to protect children against mortality, morbidity and disability across the

world.

"Around 18.3 lakh children under five years die every year due to various illnesses. These include 13.2 lakh children who die before reaching the age of one year and 9.4 lakh within the first month after birth. However, each AEFI is investigated, and an effort is made to establish the cause. Any disruption in cold chain may affect the potency, and thereby the efficacy of the vaccine, but can hardly cause deaths. In case of any contamination of vaccine to an extent that it would cause fatality, deaths of a greater magnitude would occur as any batch of vaccine is administered to a very large number of children," a health ministry official said.

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