

Alarming situation : Four children reportedly die from measles vaccine

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The provincial health minister could not be reached for comment despite repeated attempts.

PESHAWAR/CHARSADDA/SHANGLA/HANGU:

Four children have died in the province, reportedly after the administration of the measles vaccine, while reports of children fainting were received from two districts.

Two-year-old Mazhar, a resident of Shabqadar, Charsadda, died on Wednesday in a hospital in Peshawar, while three children died in the provincial capital late on Tuesday night. The deceased children hailing from Peshawar are two-year-old Hilal of Mandra Khel area, two-year-old Rida of the same village and one-year-old Abul Samand, a resident of Faqir Kalay.

Parents of the children claim they were administered the measles vaccine by health teams and soon after, the children began having an adverse reaction to the medicine ultimately leading to their death.

Mazhar's father, Fayaz Khan, told journalists his son was given the measles shot while he was visiting his grandparents' house, however, after some time Mazhar became sick and was taken to a hospital in Peshawar where he died. The father blamed the measles vaccine for his child's death.

On the other hand, Dr Farhad, the measles drive in-charge in Charsadda has denied the bereaved father's claim stating Mazhar could have died due to some other reason. "Reactions to the measles vaccine occur immediately after it is injected, while the child died after the passage of 24 hours," claimed Dr Farhad.

Information minister Shah Farman claimed on the assembly floor on Wednesday that the vaccine procured by the federal government from India was causing these side-effects. The provincial government has formulated a committee to probe into the incidents in order to ascertain whether the deaths occurred due to the vaccine.

Children fall unconscious

Instances of children falling unconscious after the administration of the vaccine were reported from the provincial capital and Shangla on Wednesday.

Three students of the Forward Public School in Peshawar fainted after receiving the shot and were rushed to the Lady Reading Hospital (LRH).

Waqas Khan, the school administrator said fear spread among the students and parents after the incident and several parents took their children home resulting in the suspension of vaccination.

According to an LRH official, the three students and a girl from Faqir Kallay were being kept at the isolation ward of the hospital and are stable.

Meanwhile, around 15 children fainted after they were administered the measles vaccine in Bazarkot, Shangla district.

An official of the Alpuri police station Zahirullah said a health department team visited Government Girls Primary School Bazarkot to immunise children, however, 15 of them fell unconscious after receiving the shot. They were rushed to District Headquarters Hospital Alpuri and were discharged after being given first aid.

District Health Officer (DHO) Gulbar told The Express Tribune that the vaccine was given to 120 students and only 15 experienced the reaction. The DHO added the vaccine was not substandard and presumed the children fainted due to the fear of receiving the injection.

Team held hostage

A measles vaccination team was held hostage in a village of Hangu district on Wednesday afternoon after residents refused to get their children vaccinated.

DHO Dr Azam Wazir told The Express Tribune the 16-member team was conducting the drive in Darshai village, Karbogha Sharif area of Thal tehsil when the residents held them hostage at a hujra and refused vaccination. Police arrived at the village and managed to get the team released after negotiations.

The provincial health minister could not be reached for comment despite repeated attempts.

The government launched a 12-day measles campaign on May 19 and since then several cases of negative reactions to the vaccine are surfacing. Around 110 adverse reactions have been recorded by the health department so far.

On Tuesday, DG Health Dr Waheed Burki addressed a news conference and declared that the reactions were “not related to the vaccine.” He insisted the vaccine procured by the federal government were of good quality, and he had no doubts about its potency and efficacy. Burki attributed the reactions to “human error”.

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