

Negligence?: Measles vaccine claims yet another life in K-P

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Health department report maintains the deaths are occurring due to untrained staff.
PHOTO: REUTERS / FILE

PESHAWAR / SWABI / SHABQADAR:

Yet another death was attributed to the measles vaccine on Thursday when 11-month-old Hazrat Umar died in Shabqadar, Charsadda after reportedly having a reaction to the vaccine, pushing the death toll to five.

According to Sher Muhammad, father of the deceased, Umar fell ill a few days ago after receiving the measles shot and died on Thursday after suffering from high fever.

Umar is the second casualty from Shabqadar in the past 24 hours.

On Wednesday, two-year-old Mazhar died after reportedly having a reaction to the vaccine as well, while three others died in the provincial capital late Tuesday night.

Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) Charsadda In-charge Dr Farhad continues to deny that the deaths of the two minors occurred due to the vaccine, claiming it could be a disease.

However, a medical specialist in Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Shabqadar told The Express Tribune on the condition of anonymity that the deaths were caused by the vaccine.

He claimed the medicine lost its efficacy due to prolonged outages in the hospitals. According to the specialist, the hospitals where the vaccines are being stored face almost 20 hours of outages. "The cold chain for all vaccines needs to be maintained; since the hospitals face outages the quality of medicine is affected," he added.

He added EPI staff in the tehsil has stopped participating in the vaccination drive fearing people might attack them.

Students fall unconscious

Around 70 more students fainted after the administration of the measles vaccine in a school in Swabi.

District Coordination Officer (DCO) Kamran Afridi told The Express Tribune the incident occurred in Working Folks Grammar School at Industrial Estate Gadoon Amazai and the children were rushed to Topi hospital.

Afridi added the district health authorities have informed the provincial health department of the situation in writing and requested that an enquiry be conducted.

Health department releases report

Meanwhile, a report prepared by the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Directorate of Health issued on Thursday claimed that the deaths of four children on Wednesday were caused by untrained staff administering the measles vaccine.

According to the report prepared by the technical unit of the department, the deaths occurred because assistants administered the injections to the children instead of health technicians.

“The deaths of children have nothing to do with the quality of vaccines,” states the report which has been forwarded to the K-P health secretary.

“Assistant-level staff was used to vaccinate the children due to which several deaths have occurred,” the report added, while recommending that the measles campaign currently under way be stopped immediately.

The document claims that the vaccines were injected into the flesh instead of the skin which is the proper procedure of administering the measles vaccine, adding the additional responsibility placed on the assistants caused them to inject the medicine incorrectly.

The report reiterated that the vaccines being used by the health department are perfect in potency and efficacy and the reactions being reported are not related to quality.

The 12-day province-wide measles campaign began on May 19. Four children had died in the province till Wednesday and hundreds have been rushed to hospitals during the ongoing measles drive, after they had an adverse reaction to the vaccine.

A senior official at the health department said the report has been forwarded to the health secretary and his instructions were awaited. He added all those found to be involved in using assistants and unskilled workers would be terminated by the health department.

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