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Polio dropped from list of suspects

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HYDERABAD: Two more babies who had been given polio drops last week died at Penuballi and Aswaraopet mandals in Khammam district on Tuesday, but experts and government officials took pains to explain that the vaccine could not possibly have caused the deaths. These two deaths and one more in Anantapur on Tuesday took the number of post-inoculation mortalities to seven.

A postmortem on the exhumed bodies of four children who had died over the weekend showed that they had succumbed to neonatal complications. Health officials said none of the seven deaths could be attributed to the oral polio vaccine drops. Nevertheless, the incident is being "critically viewed" and samples of the vaccine given to the children are being sent to the Central Drug Research Institute at Kasauli.

Family welfare officials said the children, most of them months old, either had a medical history or died of reasons not linked to the polio drops. It was a coincidence that the deaths have occurred after inoculation.

Dr R Gopalakrishna Rao, joint director of the family welfare department, said two of the Khammam deaths were due to asphyxia (suffocation) caused by vomit- "not caused by the polio drops"-and one was due to intestinal

obstruction. Some of the deaths could have occurred due to some substances being administered to the babies by the mothers: one had received oil drops in her nose and one was given a sugar syrup.

One of the seven children who died was a premature baby who had developed respiratory problems after swallowing amniotic fluid during birth. A five-year-old girl who died in Kurnool was suffering from fits, Dr Rao said.

"The deaths are a sheer coincidence. We are 100 per cent sure that the deaths have nothing to do with polio drops," Dr Rao said.

Principal secretary (medical and health) I V Subba Rao said the post mortem reports proved that the deaths were due to the vaccine.