

Paediatric OPD and Immunization Services during Corona Pandemic

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The most affected population during COVID-19 pandemic in India and other developing countries is that of child population. As soon as the lockdown was announced in March 2020, the outpatient services for children in Government, Semi-Government and Private Sector were severely affected. The basic cause for this was threefold, firstly general public and parents were so scared about spread of corona virus due to huge publicity in all kinds of media and same way even doctors rendering their services to child population practically stopped, their services, due to fear in their mind, lack of transport and strict implementation of lockdown by the authorities. Secondly, as all kinds of transport were closed by the authorities, it was impossible for parents to take their children for routine vaccines and thirdly, the police and municipal authorities were so strict about quarantines zones/houses/areas of the city and towns, that it was made impossible for anybody to take their child to the doctors. I myself have treated and advised by telecommunications, good number of paediatric patients, but nothing could be done about, routine and special vaccinations. Thus, as per WHO's recent estimate about 80 crore children were forced to loose their vaccination schedule due to factors beyond their control.

Overall effects of these loss of vaccinations is going to be seen in near future wherein commonly occurring preventable childhood diseases like Measles, whooping cough, Tuberculosis, Polio, chick-

enpox, Diphtheria, Meningitis, Hepatitis etc. will be seen affecting children in large numbers in urban as well as rural population. Although, exact figures of loss of vaccinations, district wise and state wise are not available, still as per gross assumptions 90 - 95% children could not be given their due routine vaccinations. Government authorities, were so much overwhelmed with COVID-19 management that nobody bothered about this aspect of loss of routine vaccinations in children.

Although Indian Academy of Paediatrics and some other organizations tried to arrange webinars for parents and doctors from the month of May-2020 onwards, specially for vaccinations in children, but all these efforts didn't bear any fruits and all these webinars were arranged only after initial two months of lockdown, but we can say all these efforts could not add any number of increased vaccinations. Now from the months September/October,2020 some vaccinations are being given in Government as well as Private Sectors.

If Government health Authorities in various countries - specially developing countries desire, they can still find out approximate loss of doses of vaccinations in children from their statistics of supply and use of various vaccinations in different Districts and States of the country.

All of us have to be more vigilant now about any type of cases of preventable infectious diseases coming to hospitals, OPDs, Private Paediatrics clinics. A single case of whooping cough, polio, chicken pox, Measles, Diphtheria etc. in the community has to be dealt with seriously, presuming that many more cases of those infectious diseases will be there in coming months and years. An alert should be sounded in all districts and states of the country, if a single case of any type of infectious diseases is found in children anywhere in the country.

Indian Academy of Paediatrics and similar bodies, should come out with advisories about vaccinations of missed doses in children and large publicity should be given to these advisories in lay press and electronic media for parents and general population.

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