Death due to low birth weight one of the highest in India

About 13 African countries have better infant mortality than India

New Delhi, 09 June 2017: According to statistics, as many as 700,000 newborns die in India each year. This accounts for 26% of neo-natal deaths in the world, as per UNICEF. The Causes of Death Statistics report by the census office indicates that in India, of all infants who died before they completed 29 days post-birth, about 48.1% suffered from low birth weight (LBW) and premature birth.

Death during the first 28 days of life is called as neo-natal mortality. In India, the death of every other newborn can be attributed to either LBW or premature delivery. This is a reflection of poor maternal health and an inadequate healthcare system. Research also indicates that 13 African countries have better infant mortality rates (IMR) than India.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "LBW can be due to two factors: preterm birth and a foetus that is too small for its gestational age. An overlap between these two conditions result in worst outcomes. Some causes for LBW include poor nutritional status of the mother before conception, short stature (mostly due to under-nutrition and infections during childhood), and poor nutrition during pregnancy. All these factors can be attributed to the mother. Even those infants who survive tend to have impaired immune function and an increased risk of acquiring diseases. They also remain undernourished, with reduced muscle strength throughout their lives; have cognitive disabilities, and a lower IQ, all of which can affect them in later years."

It is important to consider the following to prevent LBW: improved food intake for pregnant and lactating mothers; supplementation with micronutrients; prevention and treatment of diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS; educating and creating awareness among girls and expectant mothers; and prevention of teenage pregnancies.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "The need of the hour is a large-scale awareness campaign focusing on the importance of antenatal health of the mother and the neonatal health. There should be a renewed focus on promoting early initiation of breastfeeding."
Here are some tips for mothers to lower the risk of having a LBW infant.

- Start prenatal care early. Visit the gynaecologist regularly to closely monitor blood pressure, weight gain, and the baby’s growth and heart rate.
- Make some lifestyle changes. Smoking and alcohol increase the risk of having a LBW infant. Minor lifestyle adaptations like minimizing stress and having sufficient sleep can have significant benefits on growing foetus.
- Keep pre-existing medical illnesses under control.
- Maintain healthy weight gain and good nutrition. Increase your intake of folic acid which is found in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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