Pneumonia still a major cause of mortality in Indian children

Many children lack access to the Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine

New Delhi, 30 November 2017: About 20 children die every hour due to pneumonia in India, reveal recent statistics. Despite efforts being made toward universal immunization, more than 25 million children in India were not immunized with Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) in 2016. Pneumonia claims more lives in children around the world than any other infectious disease. A majority of those who die are from low and middle-income countries. If this continues, the disease is likely to claim 22,587 lives 2030.

Pneumonia is an acute respiratory infection which affects the lungs. It causes difficulty in breathing and limits oxygen intake. It can be caused by bacteria, fungi or viruses and is a contagious disease. 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, "Pneumonia in India in children under five is caused by malnutrition, low birth weight, non-exclusive breastfeeding, lack of measles immunization, indoor air pollution and overcrowding. When the germs reach the lungs, the lungs become inflamed and fill up with fluid. This causes breathing difficulties, which makes it difficult for enough oxygen to enter the bloodstream. The body's cells can't function as they normally would, and infection can't be flushed from the body. If untreated, the infection may continue to spread, leading to death. Certain children whose immune defenses or lungs are weakened by other illnesses, such as cystic fibrosis, abnormalities in the immune system or cancer (as well as by the chemotherapy used to treat cancer), may be more likely to develop pneumonia. Children whose airways or lungs are abnormal in other ways may have a higher risk.”

Pneumonia usually produces a fever, which in turn may cause sweating, chills, flushed skin, and general discomfort. Children can lose their appetite and seem less energetic than normal. Babies and toddlers may seem pale and limp, and cry more than usual.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “Pneumonia can be treated with antibiotics. A large majority of the cases can be tackled at home itself. Hospitalization is recommended only in very severe cases. Pneumonia is not contagious, but the upper respiratory viruses and bacteria that lead to it are. It is
a good idea to keep kids away from anyone with stuffy or runny nose, sore throat, cough, or respiratory infection in general”.

Here are some tips to prevent pneumonia in children.

- Breastfeed regularly as it is a great way to boost immunity.
- Wash hands frequently with alcohol based sanitizer every time you blow your nose, use bathroom and before eating and preparation of food.
- Children younger than 5 should be vaccinated against pneumococcal pneumonia a common form of bacterial pneumonia.
- Keep children away from people suffering from colds, flu or other respiratory infections. This greatly increases their risk of catching an infection.

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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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