

INDIA POLIO COMMUNICATION UPDATE

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Tracking and immunizing the nomadic population is now crucial for the polio eradication programme in India. Constantly on the move, they miss polio vaccination and routine immunization, and are at risk of not only getting polio but also spreading the virus. Such a group of Banjaras was tracked during an Urs at a tiger reserve project in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit district for polio immunization.

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West Bengal Chief Minister leads the war against polio

THE newly elected Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, launched the 26 June polio campaign, vowing "to eradicate the virus from wherever it is in existence". West Bengal is the only state with poliovirus transmission in India this year.

All health workers and parents "in every inch" of the state, should take the oath

that they will vaccinate their children. "We have to take the vaccine so that there are no cases of polio", the Chief Minister said calling upon parents and caregivers across the state to ensure that they immunize their children in the coming and all ensuing polio immunization campaigns to eradicate the virus from West Bengal. Ms Banerjee immunized four children while launching the campaign.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, launching the June polio campaign.



The talking doll show in Kolkata streets attracts huge crowd at every performance.

UNICEF Chief Of Field Services, Edouard Beigbeder, present on the occasion, underlined the remarkable achievement of India falling from 741 cases of polio two years ago to just one solitary case this year: "And naturally we need to go down to zero - to ensure that this disease is only a memory".

WHO National Polio Surveillance Project Deputy Project Manager, Dr Sunil Bahl, said that the whole country, in fact, the world is looking to West Bengal, and that under Ms Banerjee's leadership the virus will be eradicated. Incoming Rotary International Director

of West Bengal, Shekhar Mehta, said that the Chief Minister's support is a big boost to the polio eradication efforts in the state, which has been intensified.

The community mobiliser volunteers, their number almost trebled since the detection of the polio virus in January, to cover 37 high-risk blocks spanning nine districts, continue to counsel families during and in between the polio rounds. Interactive meetings with mothers, religious leaders, influencers, street shows and magic shows, talking doll shows are being organized throughout the high-risk blocks to create awareness

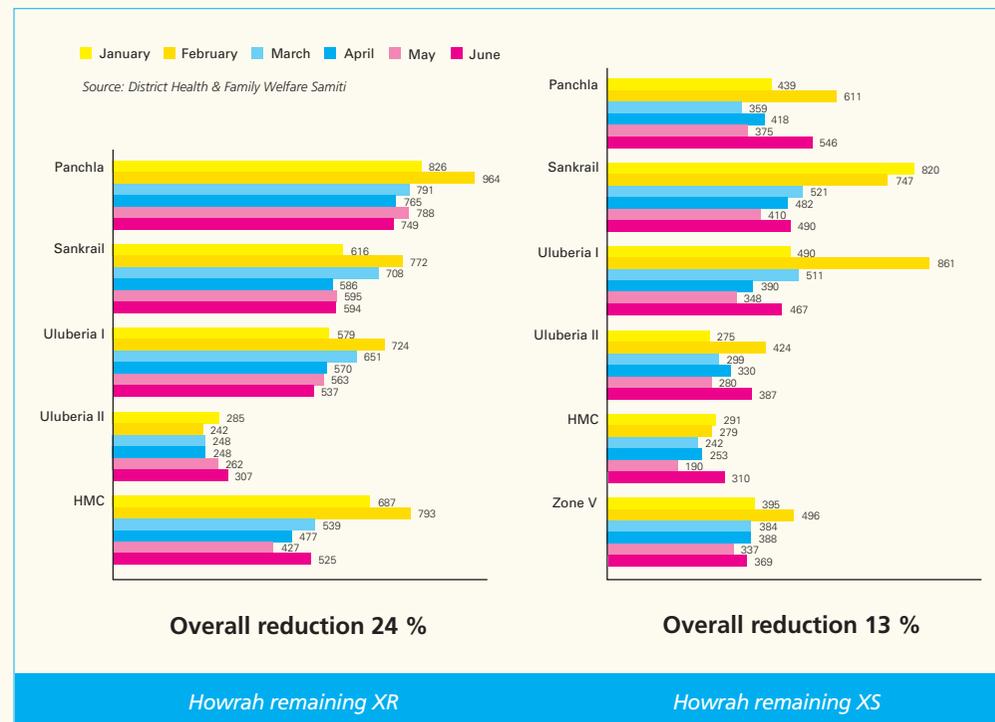
and mobilize the community on an ongoing basis. Persistent efforts to improve community mobilization through enhanced IPC training and intense activities have led to reduction in refusals to OPV and cases of community declining polio vaccination due to sickness. Religious leaders, elected representatives

of the panchayati raj and celebrities are being involved in polio advocacy.

The Kolkata Knight Riders cricket team, a favorite in the recently concluded IPL tournament, joined the 'Bowl Out Polio' campaign ahead of a match in Kolkata and the May polio campaign. ■



Kolkata Knight Riders' team members at a polio advocacy event prior to the May round in Kolkata.



Panchayat leaders address polio risk factors

RECOGNIZING the importance of engaging elected people's representatives Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to support polio eradication, an interactive day-long workshop was organized in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal on 23 June.

More than 130 panchayat members from high risk pockets/blocks participated in the workshop, conducted in

collaboration with the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development.

The workshop aimed at enhancing knowledge of participating panchayat leaders on polio and associated issues, illustrating with examples, how/what they can do for mobilizing the community and ensuring that all children under five are administered polio drops every time it is offered.

The participants came up with substantive suggestions of activities they would undertake in their respective communities/wards to address issues like sanitation and hygiene, promote routine immunization etc, to eradicate polio.

The workshop, evoked good participation from even media, and enhanced local-ownership of the polio eradication programme. ■



Panchayati Raj elected representatives discuss various initiatives to support polio eradication, in 24 South Parganas on 23 June.

Tracking nomads in hard-to-reach areas

OVER 100,000 members of a nomadic community – the Banjara's - congregated at the tiger reserve project at Puranpur, in Pilibhit district of Uttar Pradesh, for an Urs at the mausoleum of Sufi saint Syed Sela Baba Dargah.

The week-long Urs in March is sacred for the community as the Sufi saint is said to have belonged to the Banjara community. Every year, this nomadic community seeks special permission from the State Forest Department to visit the mausoleum, offer prayers and

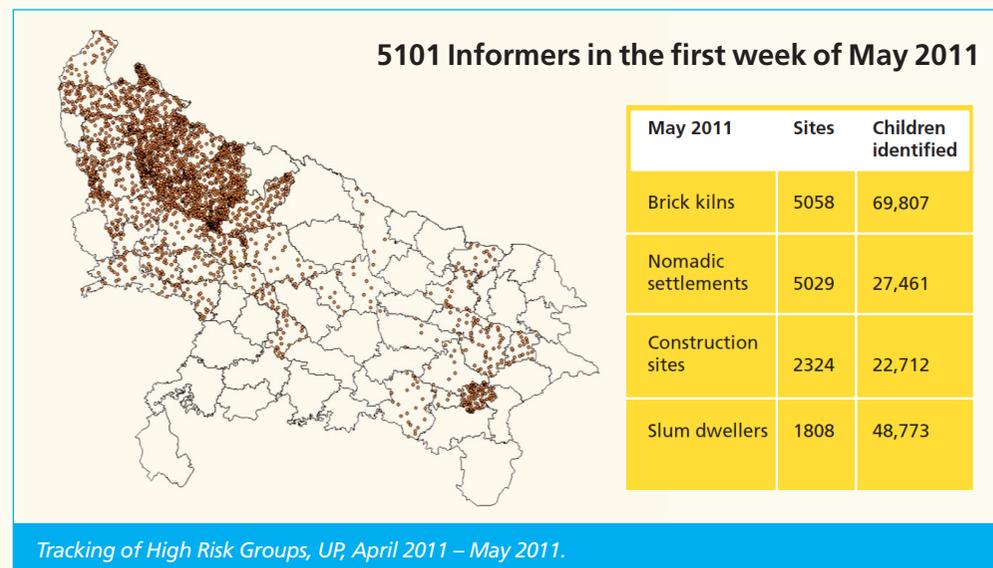
seek blessings for the well-being of their near and dear ones, especially children.

As per the 2001 census, nomads constitute 0.7% (1,260,000) of the total population in Uttar Pradesh. As occupational groups of hunters, trappers, blacksmiths, basket weavers or entertainers like puppeteers, fortune-tellers, singers and dancers, they are continuously on the move.

Over the past few years, the polio programme has put stringent measures to track such communities. The Social



UNICEF Block Mobilization Coordinator interacting with a group of Banjara's during the Urs.



Mobilization Network (SMNet) in Uttar Pradesh, in coordination with the Health Department and WHO-NPSP, sought permission of the State Forest Department to carry out polio vaccination during the congregation this year. The Health Department set up transit teams, which tracked and immunized 4,530 children under five years of age.

Banners endorsed by the Dargah Sela Baba Committee were put up to create awareness. SMNet organized 14 group meetings which were attended by 246 Banjara pilgrims, to discuss the importance of routine immunization, including polio.

A rapid and small survey was conducted with 500 Banjara families, through random sampling, to know more about the community's perspective towards polio and health seeking behaviours. With alarmingly low literacy levels, it came as no surprise that 55 percent respondents felt polio was a 'curse of God'.

The SMNet continues to endeavor to reach out and mobilise such communities for polio immunization, routine immunization and other polio-associated issues such as hygiene, sanitation, exclusive breastfeeding and diarrhea management and nutrition. Protecting such populations is now most important for the eradication programme. ■

Brick kiln chimneys spread polio messages in Bihar

25-year-old Geeta, a mother of three, has her priority clear - making 300 bricks a day. "I don't have time to even think of taking my children to the aganwadi center for routine immunization," she admits.

Hundreds of such mothers work in brick kilns in Bihar, coming from far-away states like Assam, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh in search of livelihood. Most of them are unskilled labourers and keep migrating from one place to another. As a result, their children often miss immunization, including polio.

With increased focus on migrants, UNICEF initiated efforts to generate awareness on polio among brick kiln workers. One way was through getting polio messages painted on brick kiln chimneys. The message was clear and simple – Polio-free India, two drops of protection, every child every time.

"Mobilizing brick kiln owners for getting polio messages painted on chimneys was tough," says UNICEF's community mobilizer Mohammad Mannan Alam who works in Araria district of Bihar. "Through our persistent efforts, we convinced them and now they whole-heartedly support the programme," he says with a broad smile on his face.



Polio message painted on a brick kiln chimney.

It is encouraging that brick kiln owners have come forward in the fight against polio. "We can eradicate polio from Bihar, but everybody has to pitch-in", asserts Ravindra Singh, owner of Kanchan brick kiln in Maner block, Patna. "I am fully committed to the campaign and am happy to have the polio message painted on the chimney of my brick kiln," he says. Brick kiln workers are happy with the developments. "Everytime I lookup, it reminds me of getting my child polio vaccine every time it is offered," says Sunita, a mother working at Hero Brick kiln in Patna, Bihar.

When the mobile teams of polio vaccinators visit brick kilns, the chimneys are a reminder that this dose of OPV and the subsequent doses are extremely important for every child up to five years to protect against the disease, which cripples for life, has no cure, but can be prevented by taking OPV each time it is offered.

The migrants working in brick kilns are among the highest risk populations for polio. Special interventions are made to track them, counsel them, to ensure they are covered during each polio campaign and also to study their migration patterns for interventions in their home states.

Polio outreach with nomads at Pooth mela

Every four years, members of a nomadic tribe called the 'nats' from across Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan congregate at 'Pooth Garh shrine' in Ghaziabad district of polio endemic west Uttar Pradesh. This year too, the Nats arrived months in advance at the shrine of Hukum Singh Bajaniya.

Transit teams of vaccinators, put together by the Health department in collaboration with NPSF, were deployed at strategic points to immunize children accompanying the pilgrims. To reach them with polio messages, banners were displayed at strategic points, health camps organized and audio-visual shows screened during the weeklong event. As part of this intervention, 2,647 children were vaccinated for OPV.

These nomads are constantly moving in search of livelihood, resulting in their children often missing immunization. Hence, the focus of the polio programme is on these vulnerable social groups.



CMC Kanta Sharma counsels mothers using the flip book during the mela.

Nauchandi resonates with polio and RI messages

THE Nauchandi Mela or fair - one of the largest cultural events in Meerut, the traditional polio endemic district in western Uttar Pradesh - follows a centuries old tradition initiated by cattle traders in 1672. It also highlights Hindu-Muslim harmony with the Nauchandi temple and Bala Mian Dargah (shrine) adjacent to each other and devotees from both faiths paying obeisance.

Spread over a month, the fair hosts over 50,000 people daily. The Social Mobilization Network (SMNet) in Uttar Pradesh, used the occasion to create awareness among the thousands of

devotees on polio and related issues like routine immunization, hygiene and sanitation, diarrhoea management using ORS and zinc tablets and nutrition. The intervention is pertinent in the densely populated Meerut district, which often reports sporadic cases of communities avoiding polio vaccine, making it one of the key districts for the polio programme.

The district Panchayat Member Maninder Pal Singh and Meerut District Magistrate Subhash Chandra Sharma inaugurated the special polio drive at the Nauchandi fair. As crowds swelled in the evening, transit teams were deployed at eight



A street show on polio and routine immunization in a high-risk area of Meerut.



Transit booths and mobile kiosks with polio messages at Nauchandi Fair.

strategic points from 8 pm until midnight to ensure no child missed polio immunization at the fair. Bright and attractive canopies were erected with polio messages at these strategic points. Within a span of about 10 days - from April 24 to May 2 - more than 6,000 children were given OPV at the fair.

Polio messages endorsed by local religious leaders and the district Chief Medical Officer were disseminated through banners at prime locations and by distributing leaflets to the devotees. Mobile kiosks (thelas) played messages on polio and huge screens showed Amitabh Bachchan's polio films and video clips from UNICEF's flagship serial 'Kyun Ki.....

jeena isi ka naam hai'. The event got wide media coverage in the local newspapers.

To connect with the audience, a local theatre group 'Muktakash Natya Sansthan' was engaged to conduct street plays and magic shows on polio-plus issues such as routine immunization, diarrhoea management through ORS and zinc, hygiene and sanitation and nutrition, including early initiation of and exclusive breastfeeding. The artists were oriented on technical correctness of messages and script. Going by the tremendous community response, even after the fair concluded, these street plays and magic shows were staged at various high-risk urban and rural pockets of Meerut. ■

Polio advocacy with over two million parents in Urs

THE annual Urs in Ajmer, Rajasthan, in the memory of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, a highly respected Sufi saint, fondly revered as the benefactor of the poor and popularly known as Gareeb Nawaz, attracts millions of people from across the country. Interestingly, before proceeding to Ajmer via Delhi, the devotees make a stopover at Bareilly in western Uttar Pradesh to pay homage at a local dargah.



Ala Hazrat Express, a dedicated train for travelers to the Ajmer Urs passes through Bareilly with Polio banners and posters.

While gearing up to host over 200,000 devotees from West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal, the Bareilly

administration this year also prepared for administering oral polio vaccine to children up to five years among the devotees. The intervention was synchronized with similar initiatives in Utrakhand and Rajasthan to ensure no child is missed.

The district authorities in collaboration with WHO-NPSP, deployed 15 teams for 10 days from May 27 to June 6, 2011 at strategic entry and exit points, such as railway station and the Dargah site. A local NGO also set up a health camp for the devotees. Banners and posters with messages on polio vaccination, endorsed by the dargah authorities, were put up and leaflets distributed to the pilgrims at the dargah, strategic entry and exit points and the health camp.

Railways allowed display of banners on the Ala Hazrat Express, a special train for devotees heading for the Urs in Ajmer and made regular announcements calling upon the devotees to ensure that their children take oral polio vaccine from the transit polio vaccination teams present at the station.

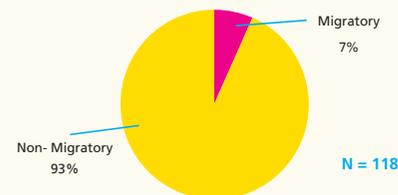
As part of this special initiative, 10,414 children were immunized at different points in Bareilly during the Urs, among them 102 resistant families were counseled and mobilized to vaccinate their children.



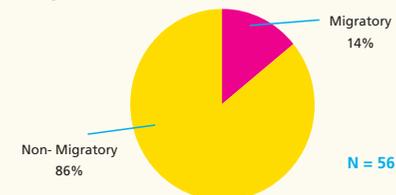
Banners promoting Oral Polio Vaccine at Khanqah-e-Niyazia street during Qul-e-Khuwaza at Bareilly.

The intervention is part of the migrant strategy of the polio eradication programme in India to ensure that people on the move are well protected against polio. In the last few years, most polio cases have been among either the mobile and migrant community or people living in proximity to them. Tracking and immunizing the migrant and mobile population is the top programme priority. The intervention in Bareilly also helped sustain the community's as well religious fraternity's support to polio eradication.

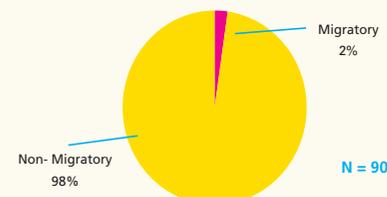
Uttar Pradesh



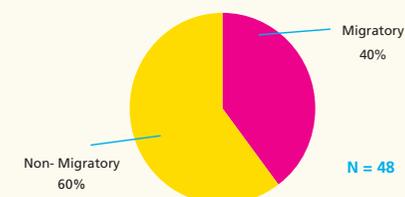
Non epidemic UP*



Bihar



Rest of India



*Non epidemic UP excludes Moradabad, JP Nagar, Badaun, Kanshiram Nagar, Bareilly and Rampur districts

*Data as on 10 July 2011

Migration status of WPV1 cases 2007-11

