



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



The First and Foremost Ritual

For centuries in India, people have been performing various traditional rituals for almost every occasion. Childbirth is one such occasion. Recently, health programs have strived to make vaccination of newborns a new birth custom.

In 2011, MCHIP (the USAID-funded Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program) carried out a study that revealed that in a majority of facilities in the states of Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, deliveries were conducted by staff nurses or Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) who were unaware of the benefits of early vaccination. A low percentage of newborns were receiving BCG vaccine and OPV zero dose even when delivered at government health facilities. Some of the reasons for this low coverage are lack of awareness of the health care providers, unavailability of one or more vaccines, and absence of a column in the birth register to capture the information.

Picture 1: Nursing staff updating newborn's vaccination status in delivery register and MCH card



The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends administration of three vaccines, namely, Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV), BCG and Hepatitis B vaccine, as early as possible after birth, preferably within 24 hours. Early administration of these vaccines has evidence-based benefits.

Picture 2: Arrangement for newborn vaccination in delivery room (within 24 hours of birth)



MCHIP provided technical support in 46 health facilities (in five focus districts) to improve the coverage with birth doses. Its technical support included capacity-building and on-the-job orientation of staff nurses and ANMs posted in delivery rooms, and incorporating separate columns in the delivery registers for recording vaccines administered (including the reason why vaccination could not be done). MCHIP staff included this practice as an agenda item for regular discussion during supervisory visits and review meetings.

As a result of the efforts of MCHIP and the local health services, vaccination within 24 hours of birth came into practice to ensure early immunity.

MCHIP's continued advocacy, technical support, feedback and feed-forward within the health department were associated with steady progress in vaccination coverage with birth doses. The intervention resulted in timely vaccination of an additional 26,000 children with BCG vaccine and 30,000 children with zero dose of OPV in a period of six months between January and June 2013, more than the total number of births occurring annually in such countries as Bahrain, Latvia, and Qatar.¹



“Newborns are very precious and in order to protect them right from their birth, early vaccination is necessary. To achieve this, we vaccinate the newborns in the labor room itself, and record in delivery register. We communicate to parents regarding all the vaccines we have given to their children and also the benefits of immunization. This way, people are more aware of the need of immunization at birth, and they ask for reasons in case their child does not receive all three birth doses within 24 hours of birth,” shares Dr. Ajay Kumar, District Immunization Officer, Jamtara

¹The State of World's Children, UNICEF, 2013.