

All newborns will get Hepatitis B vaccine

Nat'l Immunisation Plan To Roll Out In April

Kounteya Sinha | TNN

New Delhi: All children born in India will now get a vaccine shot against Hepatitis B — the cause of 80% of all liver cancer and about 1% of all adult deaths. The health ministry has finally given the go-ahead to introduce the shot in the country's national immunisation programme (NIP).

Annually, India records 26 million births. At present, these children are given diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus (DPT) vaccine shots along with BCG, measles and oral polio vaccine under NIP annually. The ministry is in the process of procuring 100 million doses of Hep B vaccine. By April, the programme will be rolled out nationally. "We have started procurement of the vaccine. Health workers in all states are being trained to administer the shots. The decision to introduce it under the NIP was taken in November," a ministry offi-

DEADLY DISEASE



- ▶ Hepatitis B is a leading cause of acute and chronic liver disease worldwide
- ▶ One in every 20 people in India carry the deadly Hep B virus
- ▶ It claims over two million lives a year globally
- ▶ The virus is transmitted through infected blood
- ▶ It attacks the liver and can cause life-long infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death

cial told TOI. Speaking to TOI from the US, Microsoft founder Bill Gates, too, welcomed the move. "Though India should soon start using a pentavalent vaccine that would include HIB, a standalone vaccine to protect children against Hep B is a move forward. India should soon introduce the rotavirus and pneumococcal vaccine which will save hundreds of children," Gates told TOI over the telephone.

Till now, Hep B vaccination was being done only in 10 high performing states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and West Bengal. A child will get a birth shot and then subsequent Hep B shots at six, 10 and 14 weeks, the health ministry official said. India has the second largest pool of carriers in the world at 43 million, out of which 10% are highly infectious.