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World Immunization Week: WHO urges renewed efforts

April 25, 2015 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

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Singapore: Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, regional director, WHO South-East Asia, in her message has called for ensuring equity with the lifesaving drugs. "Every year vaccination averts 2 to 3 million infant deaths globally from deadly diseases such as diphtheria, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, pertussis, polio and tetanus. Vaccines save lives, but 1 in 5 children, an estimated 21.8 million infants worldwide still miss out on basic vaccines. Of them, 9 million infants, more than one-third, live in WHO's South-East Asia Region," said Dr Khetrapal.

Of the 40 million children born in the region every year, only about 75 percent get all three doses of diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus vaccines. Children miss out on measles vaccines. In 2013 about 26 percent of the global measles deaths, almost 38 000, occurred in countries in the Southeast Asia Region, 27,500 in India alone.

Dr Singh mentioned further, "These grim statistics underscore the need to intensify efforts to protect children with lifesaving vaccines. We must close these immunization gaps. We must emulate lessons learnt from major public health wins, especially the polio eradication program, to reach the unreached - the underserved children living in remote areas and in deprived urban and other settings - to ensure equity with routine immunization vaccines."

With concerted efforts, WHO South-East Asia aims at maternal and neonatal tetanus elimination this year, measles elimination and rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) control by 2020; sustaining the victory over polio until the disease is eradicated globally; increasing immunization coverage to > 90 percent at the national level and to > 80 percent at the district level with the three doses of diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus vaccine.