



States attack problem of parasitic worms amongst school-age children

In September, the Government of Andhra Pradesh launched a school-based mass deworming programme to target all school-age children at risk for worm infections. Nearly two million children have already been dewormed in the first phase of rollout. The success in Andhra Pradesh has encouraged other states in the country to develop their own school-based deworming programmes.

New Delhi (India), 8 November 2009 - In September, the Government of Andhra Pradesh launched a school-based mass deworming programme to target all school-age children at risk for worm infections. Nearly two million children have already been dewormed in the first phase of rollout. During Independence Day celebrations earlier in August, the government showcased a tableau with the theme: *'India was free in 1947...Let our children be worm free in 2009'*.

Andhra Pradesh is scaling up deworming because of the important health and education benefits of deworming for children. Parasitic worms are a problem, because they can limit nutrient absorption and cause internal bleeding, leading to anemia and malnutrition. As a result, children are either too sick or too tired to concentrate in class or to attend school.

Treating school children for parasitic worms is safe, simple and effective. Treatment is needed only once or twice per year, and results in substantial education and health benefits at a cost of less than 24 rupees per child per year.

The Education Minister for Secondary Education in Andhra Pradesh, Sri Manikya Vara Prasad, said, *"Evidence has shown that deworming reduces school absenteeism by as much as 25%. Over the long term, children persistently infected with worms earn 43% less as adults. I commit that the School Education Department will reach out to every child through this programme."*

The school-based mass deworming programme in Andhra Pradesh was jointly led by the Department of Health, Medical and Family Welfare, the Department of School Education, and the Department of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan. This partnership structure, in coordination with partners Deworm the World (DtW), the World Bank, Azim Premji Foundation, and SKS Microfinance, has been critical in creating a solid foundation for the scale-up of a sustainable school health programme to improve children's health and education.

The Health Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Sri Danam Nagender, said, *"Malnutrition is already common in children, and so are worm infections. Because worms prevent nutrient absorption, children then become further malnourished. Deworming children shows tremendous improvement in children's health and nutrition."*

The mass treatment of school children for parasitic worms is one of the most cost-effective methods of increasing school participation of any approach rigorously tested. It is also a cost effective way to improve the health of these children.

Deworm the World helped support Andhra Pradesh in realizing their deworming goals by providing technical and coordination assistance to the government programme. The success in Andhra Pradesh has encouraged other states to develop their own school-based deworming programmes. Deworm the World is now working with other state governments in India to replicate this sustainable model.

The Health Minister of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, Hon. Prof. Kiran Walia, said, *"The evidence on the benefits of school-based deworming is compelling. We are already planning for the implementation of school-based mass deworming through Delhi government schools in all areas where worms are a problem. The Ministries of Health and Education will work closely together to make this happen."*

PICTURES



Independence Day Tableau in Andhra Pradesh with the message: 'India was free in 1947...Let our children be worm free in 2009' (August 15, 2009)



Demonstration in Andhra Pradesh of school-based deworming, where tablets are being administered by teachers (August 2009)

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Interviews

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2. About Deworm the World

Launched by a group of Young Global Leaders at the 2007 World Economic Forum, Deworm the World (DtW) improves access to education through supporting, coordinating, and advocating for school-based deworming programmes. DtW works directly with Ministries of Education and Health and other development partners to identify and remove barriers for the effective implementation of systematic, scaled and sustainable school-based deworming programs.

As government demand for deworming programmes is ever increasing, DtW is ever more called upon to provide governments with high quality technical support and capacity building, ranging from coordination of medication donations to in-depth technical assistance to support country programs. With additional funding, DtW can extend its efforts and meet the growing demand to support the design, strengthening, and scaling up of sustainable school-based deworming programs.

Four hundred million school-age children are infected with parasitic worms worldwide, which both damage their health and limit their access to education. This problem has a simple and inexpensive solution. Mass deworming programs based in schools costs just rupees per child, and research proves it's the most cost-effective way of increasing access to education.

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