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Indian state of Bihar makes history with world's largest school-based deworming program

Patna, India:

Over 17 million children in the Indian state of Bihar were provided with deworming treatment as part of one of the largest school-based deworming efforts ever conducted in the world. The announcement was made by Mr. Rajesh Bhushan, the State Project Director of the Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) and Secretary of Public Relations Department, Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary of Department of Health & Family Welfare and Executive Director of the State Health Society Bihar (SHSB), and Ms. Prerna Makkar, Regional Director - South Asia, Deworm the World (DtW) as they reported the results of Bihar's first-ever statewide school-based deworming program implemented from February through April 2011. Mr. Kumar said "it is remarkable that such a technically simple intervention, as regular and systematic deworming, can have such a profound effect on the nutritional, health and education status of millions of children."

Bihar has a very high rate of parasitic worm infection, with all school-age children at risk and more than 50% infected in most districts, according to prevalence surveys conducted by DtW. As worm infections damage children's health, education and development, all school-age children in Bihar - nearly 21 million - were targeted for deworming by this program. Infected children are more likely to suffer from malnutrition and anemia, resulting in children who are either too sick or too tired to concentrate in class or to attend school. This can cause lifelong harm to a child with research showing that children who remain infected earn 43% less as adults, and are 13% less likely to be literate.

Fortunately, treating worm infection is as easy as administering a deworming tablet once or twice each year to all school-age children. The medication is safe for both infected and uninfected children, and delivery through schools ensures the greatest coverage and impact. Deworming children in schools, where the treatment is administered by teachers and supported by healthcare staff, is a simple and cost-effective way to improve children's health and their ability to learn. Researchers at Harvard University and University of California, Berkeley have found that school-based deworming reduces school absenteeism by as much as 25%.

This massive first-time deworming program in Bihar was launched under the direction of the

State School Health Coordination Committee (SSHCC), an inter-sectoral committee between the SHSB and the BEPC in coordination with DtW. Mr. Bhushan stated that “a strong three-way partnership amongst the BEPC, SHSB, and Deworm the World along with elaborate advance planning and large-scale training of education and health personnel led to the program's success.” Program costs in Bihar were financed by the BEPC, SHSB and Information and Public Relations Department, with support for DtW’s technical, coordination and monitoring assistance provided by the World Bank and the Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases.

During the program, nearly 140,000 teachers and 20,000 healthcare staff throughout Bihar were trained to deliver the medication. “Deworming Day” treated both enrolled and non-enrolled children between the ages of 6 and 14 through a network of over 67,000 government schools statewide. Children who receive treatment benefit immediately - previous research shows that school participation increases and children are better able to learn in school. The SSHCC is actively considering implementing a second round of deworming in 2012, with the goals of continuing treatment for the millions of children already reached, and expanding the program to include even more school-age children.

The large scale of the Bihar program exemplifies the success and positive impacts of school-based deworming. According to Dr. Lesley Drake, Executive Director of DtW, “there are very few interventions which are as safe, cost effective and as easy to administer as deworming. For less than 50 cents per year, a child can be free from worms and free to learn. The children of Bihar are already experiencing the benefits of treatment, and we will continue to support governments in their efforts to ensure that millions more children can live healthy lives and fully reap the benefits of education.”

Bihar provides a model that can be rapidly scaled up and sustained over time to improve the education, health and productivity of school-age children.

Find out more about school-based deworming at www.dewormtheworld.org

[Click here for more information about DtW's deworming work.](#)

Notes

Deworm the World (DtW) is an initiative of Innovations for Poverty Action and the Partnership for Child Development. DtW works directly with Ministries of Education and Health, in coordination with development partners, to help launch, strengthen and sustain school-based deworming programmes.

DtW has helped to reach over 37 million children in 27 countries.

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