

SEHAT CHECK



AUGUST
2023

—
A monthly roundup of
news articles on
women's health in
Pakistan

A Joint Project of



EDITOR'S NOTE

HELLO THERE!

This month, we are once again releasing a special issue dedicated to Global Breastfeeding Week, and it's remarkable how the conversation has evolved since then.

There is now a growing recognition that breastfeeding holds significant importance for both newborns and new mothers. Its health benefits have long-term implications. Fortunately, this awareness has reached the Pakistani government, which is committed to enacting legislation to support breastfeeding for Pakistani women. Given the serious health challenges faced by the country's children, this step can potentially ensure a healthier and more active future for them, reducing both stunted growth and frequent illnesses. Furthermore, the introduction of paid maternity leave and daycare centers means that Pakistani mothers can now care for their children without facing penalties.

Of course, all of these positive developments have been made possible thanks to the tireless efforts of UNICEF Pakistan. The organisation has been at the forefront of creating awareness campaigns, hosting seminars, conducting research, and engaging in active discussions with the government and stakeholders. With these efforts bearing fruit, it is safe to say that these advancements will stand as the organisation's greatest legacy in the country!



WOMEN'S WELLNESS

Source:
The News

Date:
10-8-2023



BISP'S NASHONUMA PROGRAMME REACHES 770,000 BENEFICIARIES

The Country Director of World Food Programme (WFP) Chris Kaye called on Shazia Marri, Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety and Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme, at latter's office today. Ms. Shazia Marri said that the Benazir Nashonuma Programme has transitioned and expanded beyond its initial pilot project phase, now encompassing the entire country. Presently, Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is providing support to 770,000 lactating mothers and infants through 488 Facilitation Centers spread across Pakistan, delivering both Special Nutritious Food (SNF) and cash stipends. The Federal Minister expressed her gratitude for the technical assistance provided by WFP to the BISP's Benazir Nashonuma Programme. She highlighted that this initiative facilitates 770,000 mothers and children with specialised nutritious food and cash stipends.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



Source:
The News

Date:
9-8-2023

FIVE BABIES DIE AFTER WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO SEXTUPLETS IN HYDERABAD

A woman gave birth to six premature babies at a Khidmat Khaliq Foundation hospital in Hyderabad on Tuesday, of whom five babies died. According to the KKF administration, Rekha, wife of Lucman, a resident of the Kunri area of Umarnot, had given birth to sextuplets – three boys and as many girls. However, four of the babies died shortly after birth and another baby passed away later. The only surviving baby girl was said to be in the ICU. According to the hospital administration, the mother's health is in good condition.

PROBE INTO STILLBIRTH OF TWINS ORDERED

The deputy commissioner of Pakpattan appointed Dr. Asif Jalil, district health officer (DHO), to inquire into the incident in which a woman gave birth to twin sons who had already died before delivery allegedly due to "grave negligence" by the gynecological staff at the District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ). Sources said that Ayub had taken his wife Shumaila to the government hospital where she gave birth to the dead twins. Ayub alleged that medical assistance had not been extended to Shumaila which resulted in the death of the twins before they were delivered. The bereaved family members staged a protest demonstration outside the hospital's gynecology block, demanding justice. Ayub said that he had to run from pillar to post to get someone to attend to her wife but in vain. He alleged that the hospital staff had failed to assess her wife's condition and didn't take her case as an emergency. Ayub alleged that he was made to buy vital medical supplies, including syringes and tablets to control hypertension, from a chemist outside the ward because they were not provided by the hospital.

Source:
Express
Tribune

Date:
10-8-2023

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Source:
Express
Tribune

Date:
15-8-2023



IN THE WOMB OF CHANGE

Amidst the global chorus on climate change, a silent concern echoes: its impact on pregnancy and the health of unborn children. In a country like Pakistan, where the population stands at over 240 million and the growth rate remains one of the highest in the world, this issue takes on a heightened significance. With 18,984 live births per day (791.00 in an hour), the implications of climate change on maternal health and prenatal development become even more pressing. As Earth's climate undergoes transformation, its effects on pregnancy have garnered increasing attention. By understanding such complexities and embracing adaptive strategies, policymakers and healthcare providers can navigate this uncharted terrain to safeguard the well-being of expectant mothers and the future generations they nurture. The Heatwave Pregnancy Paradox: The National Climate Change Policy of Pakistan underscores the severe risks posed by extreme heat to maternal health, culminating in preterm births, low birth weights and maternal heat stress. Dr Farah Saeed, a specialist in rural health, explains, "In remote enclaves where medical facilities are scarce, pregnant women face elevated risks during heatwaves, their susceptibility to complications amplified due to dehydration and heat-induced strain." Maternal heat stress carries a spectrum of adverse consequences, elevating the risk of conditions like preeclampsia and gestational diabetes. Also, prolonged exposure to heightened temperatures increases the likelihood of dehydration, triggering premature labour and impeding fetal development.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Source:
Frontier
Post

Date:
17-8-2023



PRESIDENT STRESSES ADOPTING PREVENTIVE STEPS TO AVOID DISEASES

President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday said adopting preventive measures could help people avoiding or minimizing intensity of diseases, and improving the overall health condition of the population of the country. Health and education are the two basic sectors which needed to be put on top priority because nations always build on these two areas, he said while addressing the “Med-Health Expo 2023 and Summit” here. The president said the people specially those with limited resources could easily avoid the chronic diseases such as breast cancer, hepatitis, and communicable diseases by adopting preventive measures. With regard to deteriorating health sector in the country, the president highlighted that lack of decision-making, avoidance of merit and corruption in the past were the main reason behind limited health facilities in the country. The health sector exhibition was organized by Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) aimed at information exchange, learning, and cooperation opportunities for health professionals. The two-day event would showcase the latest research and developments in various medical fields through a series of sessions. President Alvi stressed universities and academia to promote research in the health sector that would bring tremendous improvement in human health. He urged the medical professionals to move along with the world that was doing advance research on human DNA to predict the disease in people. He also called upon the industrialists to produce affordable medical devices to ensure access of people especially from all walks of society to the quality medical facilities. President Alvi said the industrialists and the exporters should explore big potential markets such as Africa to increase their exports of pharmaceutical and surgical instruments. He informed that some 9 million pregnancies occurred annually in the country out of which 50% were unwanted which could easily be avoided by providing contraceptive facilities to the people.

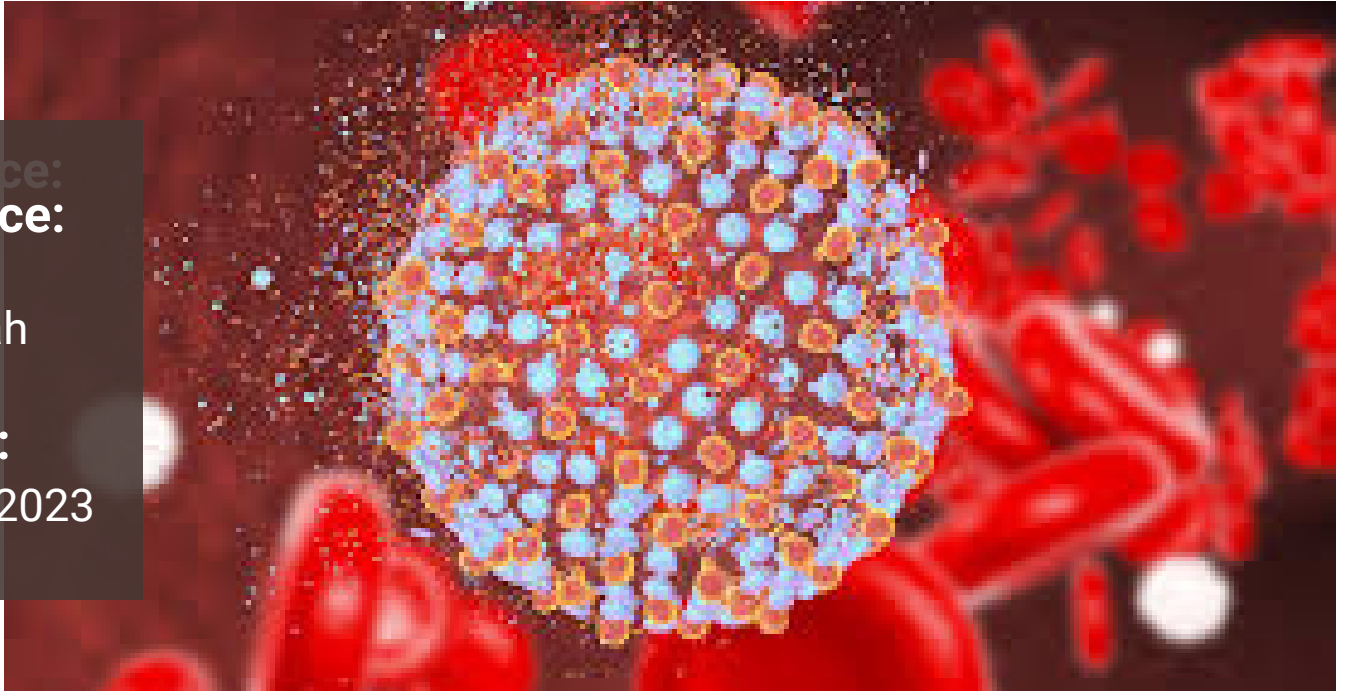
DISEASES & INJURIES

Source:

Daily
Jinnah

Date:

12-8-2023



RAWALPINDI: 7 PREGNANT WOMEN ALONG WITH 200 PEOPLE DIAGNOSED WITH HEPATITIS (TRANSLATION)

During the previous month some 200 people were tested for Hepatitis B and C in Rawalpindi. it was found that 7 pregnant women and some 200 people were diagnosed with it. The first stage was completed between 10th to 17th July. Where 10166 people were screened and 2679 were vaccinated. This has been conducted by primary and secondary health department with the support of Rawalpindi Union Council 10, 11, 14 and 15. In the second phase 3921 people were screened out of which 19 were infected with Hepatitis B and 91 were Hepatitis C patients. 899 people have been vaccinated so far, according to the Health Department Hepatitis Prevention And Elimination (LHEAP), is an investigative project where 100,000 people will be tested for Hepatitis.

DISEASES & INJURIES

Source:
The
Nation

Date:
23-8-2023



PINK RIBBON, HEC HONOUR UNIVERSITIES LEADING BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

CEO of Pink Ribbon Pakistan, Omer Aftab highlighted Pink Ribbon's successful engagement with numerous universities across the country. He acknowledged the crucial role played by HEC's unwavering support in this achievement. Aftab emphasised that the partnership had empowered young women with essential knowledge for early breast cancer detection and fostering health-conscious attitudes and lifestyles. He also shared that the establishment of a dedicated breast cancer hospital by Pink Ribbon is well underway and is projected to be completed by the end of this year. The hospital's mission is to provide comprehensive free-of-cost consultation, diagnosis, and financial support to breast cancer patients. Executive Director HEC, Dr. Shaista Sohail lauded Pink Ribbon Pakistan's remarkable accomplishments in advocating for breast cancer awareness over two decades. She commended academic institutions for their proactive engagement in promoting health consciousness among students. Dr. Sohail highlighted the pivotal role of the Pink Ribbon Youth Awareness Programme in raising awareness across generations. She noted that breast cancer's prevalence in Pakistan stands at an alarming 38.5%, the highest among all cancers, underlining the urgent need for heightened awareness and early detection. She called upon all stakeholders to unite in combating this issue, recognising the potential of collaboration to overcome breast cancer's high prevalence. NAHE is an autonomous institution operating under the auspices of HEC to improve the quality of teaching, research and governance in Higher Education Institutions. Pink Ribbon Pakistan is a not for profit charity organisation dedicatedly working on the issue of breast cancer since 2004. Its mission is to significantly reduce breast cancer mortality in the country by strategic interventions as well as creating widespread awareness through community engagement on prevention, early detection and increased access to treatment.

DISEASES & INJURIES

Source:

Daily
Mashriq

Date:

21-8-2023



HYDERABAD: GIRL DIED AFTER RECEIVING MEASLES VACCINE (TRANSLATION)

A girl died after allegedly getting vaccinated during the measles campaign in Hyderabad. The girl was suffering from fever soon after she was vaccinated. Her condition worsened and she was admitted to Bhatai Hospital where she died.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Source:
Dawn

Date:
9-8-2023



DIRE NEED FOR PUBLIC TOILETS, GOVT INDIFFERENCE HIGHLIGHTED AT SEMINAR

The importance, rather dire need, of clean and functional public toilets, especially for women, was discussed at a seminar held at the Urban Resource Centre (URC) here on Tuesday. Senior journalist Zofeen T. Ebrahim said that she encountered embarrassed faces or sheepish smiles whenever anyone outdoors mentioned needing to use a toilet. "But there is still a need to speak up on this because stopping or controlling oneself can lead to health issues," she said. "In our country girls drop out of schools after reaching puberty because of menstrual hygiene needs," she pointed out. "Women with small children need toilets more because their children also need to go," she said. "I've surveyed the city, I've been to Sindh and the toilets here leave me nauseous. So when I travel, I don't drink water just so I won't need to use the bathroom. It is so stressful that I think twice before attempting to travel by road," she said. "People in the USA also talk about toilets. But there the debate is about fewer toilets than needed. And here we talk about not having any toilets. Meanwhile, countries such as Singapore, Japan, etc which are more advanced than the US, debate about better and cleaner toilets for citizens," Ms Ebrahim said.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Source:

The Nation

Date:

23-8-2023



MENSTRUATION IN RURAL AREAS

Periods have long been a significant taboo in rural areas, where menstruation has been intentionally withheld from women under the guise of “protecting their chastity.” Unfortunately, this mindset has adverse effects on both their physical and emotional well-being. Traditionally, women in these regions have used rags and cloth to manage their menstrual flow, but due to the stigma surrounding periods and a lack of reproductive education, hygiene standards are low, leading to numerous cases of infections being contracted. Additionally, female family members often share the same menstrual rags, heightening the risk of urinary and reproductive tract infections. Unfortunately, schools lack education and awareness on this topic, and even within homes, discussions are rare among women. Many women still feel uncomfortable due to the gaze of leering shopkeepers and prefer to have their husbands purchase menstrual products for them. For the past three years, I have been organizing medical camps in my village, Alipur Kanju, located in the southern province of Pakistan. A considerable number of women suffered from reproductive and urinary tract infections due to the adoption of unhygienic methods during menstruation, which consequently resulted in infertility and complications during childbirth. Furthermore, the absence of soap, clean water, and proper bathrooms made maintaining hygiene nearly impossible. Many young girls remained uninformed about this natural process because mothers hesitated to discuss it, and schools failed to address these crucial issues, leading to a high dropout rate. The menstrual taboo perpetuates a sexist stereotype that impacts girls and women worldwide.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Source:
The News

Date:
27-8-2023



PERIOD POVERTY IN PAKISTAN

Period poverty was recognised as a global health crisis in early 2010. The World Health Organisation and the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund have identified menstrual health as a health and human rights issue. According to the World Bank estimates, about 500 million girls and women worldwide lack access to menstrual products, adequate sanitation and health facilities required for menstrual health management. In December 2012, a joint monitoring programme (JMP), initiated by the WHO and the UNICEF in 1990, defined menstrual health management (MHM) as, “access to WASH (water sanitation and hygiene) facilities, an absorbent material for menstrual blood collection and water and soap for personal hygiene during periods for girls and women.” Menstruation health is critical for achieving several sustainable development goals (SDGs), mainly SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation for all). In South Asia, the condition of three-dimensional period poverty is dire. It is observed that young girls often start their periods uninformed and unprepared. For many, their only source of information about menstruation is their mothers. Many women lack the means for self-care and support during menstruation, negatively affecting their ability to perform everyday tasks. In Pakistan, the employment-to-population ratio is only 21 percent for women, compared to 68 percent for men. This is alarmingly low. One of the factors contributing to this low participation rate of women is period poverty and the lack of the necessary educational, financial and social support that restricts the movement of women during menstruation. Research on period poverty in Pakistan is limited, but the research that does exist suggests high prevalence of three-dimensional period poverty in Pakistan.

GLOBAL BREASTFEEDING WEEK

Source:
The News

Date:
1-8-2023



LET'S MAKE BREASTFEEDING AND WORK, WORK!

“Breastmilk works like a baby’s first vaccine, protecting infants from potentially deadly diseases and giving them all the nourishment they need to survive and thrive,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO. Each year, World Breastfeeding Week is marked from 1-7 August, supported by WHO and UNICEF. This year, the focus of the awareness campaign is about working mothers and maternity rights that support breastfeeding. Campaign theme is ‘let’s make breastfeeding and work, work’. Every child has the right to good health and yet, many children do not receive adequate nutrition leading to stunting, illness, and sometimes death. WHO estimates that globally, breastfeeding could save the lives of over 820,000 children under the age of 5 years, each year. The key point is ‘optimal’ breastfeeding, which means women should start breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth; provide exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life; and introduce complementary solid foods at 6 months together with continued breastfeeding up to 2 years of age. In Pakistan, around 42 per cent of children are stunted. According to the latest survey from 2022, less than 50 per cent of children under six months of age are exclusively breastfed and the majority of women who breastfeed are homemakers, while the proportion of working women in this is very small. WHO recommends at least 18 weeks of paid maternity leaves. Focusing on working women is also important if we hope to achieve the WHO target of improving the rate of exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months to at least 50 per cent by 2025.

GLOBAL BREASTFEEDING WEEK

Source:
The News

Date:
3-8-2023



ONLY 45 PER CENT WOMEN EXCLUSIVELY BREASTFEED CHILDREN

Only 45 per cent mothers are exclusively breastfeeding their children in Pakistan as per the latest demographic survey, which is the leading cause of diarrhoea, pneumonia, childhood obesity, malnutrition and recurrent infections among infants, government officials and health experts from World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday. They said over 35,000 infants were dying due to diarrhoea and other infectious diseases linked to breast milk substitutes while millions were malnourished, stunted and deprived of growth due to indiscriminate use of formula milk in the country. "Rate of exclusive breastfeeding is very low in Pakistan and as per the latest demographic survey, only 45 per cent women exclusively breastfeed their children in the first 6 months", Dr. Palitha Mahipala, WHO country representative to Pakistan said while addressing participants of a walk held in connection with World Breastfeeding Week 2023 in Islamabad. The walk was organized by the WHO and Unicef in collaboration with Nutrition Wing of Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHS,R&C) and it was attended by Director General Health Services Dr. Baseer Achakzai, Dr. Khwaja Masoud, Director General Health Sindh Dr. Irshad Memon, Secretary General Pakistan Pediatric Association (PPA) Dr. Khalid Shafi, DHO Islamabad Dr. Zaeem Zia, Dr. Sara Salman from WHO Sindh, Dr. Mubashir Hanif Director ORIC at Health Services Academy (HSA) Islamabad and others.

GLOBAL BREASTFEEDING WEEK

Source:
The News

Date:
11-8-2023



BREASTFEEDING REDUCES INFANT MORTALITY

The lives of nearly 820,000 children under the age of five could be saved every year by increasing breastfeeding rates in Pakistan, said experts at a seminar organised by the health ministry in Islamabad on Wednesday as part of breast cancer awareness week activities that take place in the first week of August across the globe. Experts at the seminar underscored the importance of a mother's milk, saying it had the necessary nutrients for the nourishment and development of the child. Powdered milk cannot be a substitute for mother's milk, they said. The director general of the health department, Dr Baseer Achakzai, said that breastfeeding would help bring down rates of breast cancer and maternal mortality. Pakistan has one of the worst maternal mortality rates in the world, with 186 deaths every 100,000 live births, according to 2020 data, although it was a massive improvement from earlier numbers. It must be noted that the numbers remain skewed, with the rate highest in Balochistan (298), followed by Sindh (224), while Punjab and Gilgit-Baltistan reported 157 deaths and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 165 deaths, according to a UN agency.

GLOBAL BREASTFEEDING WEEK

Source:
Dawn

Date:
29-8-2023



BREASTFEEDING ROOM TO BE SET UP AT WORKPLACE IN ATTOCK

Deputy Commissioner Attock Rao Atif Raza on Monday said as per guidelines of the Punjab government, a breastfeeding room would be set up at the workplace where mothers can breastfeed their babies in an atmosphere of privacy and comfort. He was addressing a meeting held to review the arrangements in connection with World Breastfeeding Week which was attended by all six assistant commissioners, deputy district health officers, officials from Integrated Reproductive Maternal Newborn, District Population Welfare Office and social welfare department. He said that during the week, walks at Tehsil Headquarters (THQ) Hospital, RHC primary health centers and MCH centres across the district will be held and banners displayed. He said establishment of day care centres at the workplace, implementation of minimum six months maternity leave law for mother, implementation of 30 days paternity leave law for father, newborn and mother's best health includes ensuring a safe and healthy workplace environment would also be ensured at all government offices of the district.



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Gender Watch

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