

Rksk will Comprehensively Address the Health Needs of the Country's Adolescent Population : Ghualm Nabi Azad

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Ghualm Nabi Azad, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare launched the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), here today. He also inaugurated the three-day National Adolescent Health Consultation.

The Union Health Minister, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad while addressing the gathering stated that the programme will comprehensively address the health needs of the 243 million adolescents, who account for over 21% of the country's population. He said that so far the efforts have been partial, confined to sexual and reproductive health, that too at select government facilities. The Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) will bring in several new dimensions, which he listed as- mental health, nutrition, substance misuse, gender based violence and non-communicable diseases. The programme introduces community based interventions through peer educators, and is underpinned by collaborations with other Ministries and State governments, knowledge partners and more research. Referring to the strategic approach to RMNCH+A (Reproductive, Maternal, New born, Child Health + Adolescent) in which `A` denotes adolescents, unveiled last year at Mahabalipuram, the Health Minister said that new focus on adolescents is in recognition of the fact that without adolescent health, maternal and child health outcomes may continue to elude us.

Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad said that the 5 by 5 RMNCH+A matrix has been developed which lists out the 5 high impact interventions under each of the 5 pillars, all of which need to be implemented together, at the same time, with high coverage and quality.

Speaking at the occasion, Sh K Desiraju, Health Secretary said that the programme is an effort to move away from a 'doctor-driven' effort towards a holistic and participative programme. The RKSK recognizes that all adolescents need attention even before the occurrence of any disease or problem, and in order to make informed decisions and choices.

Highlighting the salient features of the programme and the need for an enhanced and sharper focus on adolescents, Smt Anuradha Gupta, Addl. Secretary and Mission Director, NRHM stated that adolescents present a unique opportunity to reap the country's demographic dividends. This, she pointed out, will not be possible without investing in their health needs. She explained that lifestyle and behavior related diseases such as substance abuse, inflicting self harm, tendency towards gender-based violence, low nutrition and physical inactivity, which begin and occur more during this phase, are fast becoming the causes for the highest mortality in this age group. She stated that in the coming years in the developing countries, seven out of ten deaths will be due to non-communicable diseases. The RKSK programme defines an adolescent as a person within 10-19 years of age, in urban and rural areas, includes both girls and boys, married and unmarried, poor and affluent, whether they are in school or out of school. This broad definition helps to address the myriad problems of adolescents across various groups and categories, she stated. The programme emphasis seven 'Cs'- coverage, content, communication, counselling, clinics and convergence. She stated that active use of new technologies and social media

platforms will form an integral part of the programme to reach the adolescents in their own spaces, with strategic partnerships with communities and peers. The Health Minister also launched the handbooks on strategy frameworks which includes the framework for monitoring, supervision and evaluation of the programme once it is rolled out; the handbook on operational framework which will help to translate the programme into action; and the resource pack for the ANMs, ASHAs, medical officers, LHVs and peer educators. Also present at the launch function were Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA, Ms. Fredika Meijer, UNFPA representative for Bhutan and India, senior officers from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Health Secretaries from different States, and representatives from UNICEF.

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