World Prematurity Day
November 17, 2019

Ensuring timely care to newborns can reduce the burden of death and disability due to preterm births

Islamabad - 16 November 2019: Children born too soon can survive if they receive the right care at the right time and in the right place, says the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) as the World Prematurity Day (WPD) is commemorated on November 17, 2019.

‘Born Too Soon: Providing the right care, at the right time, in the right place,’ is the theme for WPD this year. Preterm birth is one of the leading causes of child deaths under age 5 as almost 15 million babies in the world are born prematurely and nearly 1 million die due to related complications.

New initiatives have been taken by the Government of Pakistan and its development partners to reduce preterm births and newborn mortality due to related complications as over 600 newborns die in the country every day due to complications related to Birth Asphyxia, Prematurity and Sepsis.

“UNICEF is assisting the Government of Pakistan to scale up evidence-based cost-effective interventions such as Kangaroo Mother Care across the country to reach most marginalised communities,” says Aida Girma, UNICEF Representative in Pakistan.

“By ensuring high quality care for every newborns, providing nursing care for the best start in life and empowering women and adolescents girls to take decisions concerning their health, precious lives lost due to premature births can be saved, she adds.”

UNICEF Pakistan is supporting 12 facilities across the country for Maternal and New born Survival (Three in Punjab, Three in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Two in Sindh, one in Baluchistan, one in AJK, one in GB and one in ICT). These
centres of excellence are being strengthened to practice and promote implementation of interventions critical for maternal and newborn survival including Essential Newborn Care, Use of Chlorhexidine for Umbilical Cord Care, Kangaroo Mother Care and care of the very small and sick new born babies.

Collaborative efforts have helped in reduction of new born mortality from 55 deaths per 1,000 live births to 42 deaths per 1,000 live births during the last five years. However, the number of new born deaths is still unacceptably high and continued efforts are imperative to save precious lives. Neonatal and infant mortality are likely to be higher for small or very small children (PDHS 2017-18).

Small and sick newborns, most of whom are born preterm, have the highest risk of death and contribute to the majority of the world’s disabled children. Over last couple of years 38 sick new born care units have been strengthened across Pakistan with UNICEF support. The most vulnerable newborns are those in marginalized groups, rural areas, urban slum environments and humanitarian settings.

High quality, affordable care (Universal Health Care) before, during and after childbirth for all women and babies can prevent many maternal and newborn deaths. Good hygiene care can also help prevent multiple infections while early initiation of breast feeding within the first hour can particularly help prevent deaths.

UNICEF emphasises that the reduction in premature births and newborn deaths can be achieved by strengthening health policies and services with focus on maternal nutrition and improving access and care for mothers and new-borns. ###

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