

Five-day-old baby dies of rubella syndrome

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Pune: A baby girl born with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) died five days later at a city hospital on December 24 last year.

The baby, born to a 26-year-old Pimpri woman, was delivered at a private hospital in Wai (Satara district) on December 19. She was born full term (35 weeks and 5 days) and weighed 1,700 gram at birth.

"However, unlike other newborns, the baby didn't cry immediately after birth and had mild respiratory distress. She also had classical manifestation of CRS, including an abnormally small head, cataracts in the eyes, a congenital heart defect, enlarged liver and spleen, and affected brain," paediatrician Amruta Walimbe said.

The baby was shifted to Bharati hospital's neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in Pune soon after birth.

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Rubella syndrome death uncommon, say experts

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Pune: Any death due to congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) is considered relatively uncommon, experts said after a five-day old baby succumbed to the disease on December 24.

"The baby had tested positive for rubella antibodies. This is the first death due to CRS I have seen in the last three years," paediatrician Sanjay Lalwani said.

A family member of the mother said she suffered from fever in her third trimester, which was treated symptomatically. "We didn't know that it was a rubella virus-induced illness," the family member said.

Lalwani said babies with CRS usually survive. "They, however, present with some defect at a later stage," he said.

The experts said there were no statistics available of deaths due to CRS in India. "Having said that, the death of the baby born with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) reinforces the importance of the ongoing measles-rubella vaccination drive," they added.

CRS is an illness resulting from rubella virus infection during pregnancy. Up to 90% of infants born to mothers who had rubella during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy develop CRS, which can cause one or more problems,

VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASE

Congenital Rubella Syndrome accounts for severe morbidity, including childhood blindness, deafness, heart disease and mental retardation

IMMUNIZATION VITAL

■ Girls should be immunized against the disease in their teens or during the child-bearing age (before they get pregnant). However, conducting rubella testing of pregnant mothers is not a standard practice during ante-natal check-up

■ If a woman takes rubella vaccine after marriage, she should avoid conception for next three months



■ If a woman conceives soon after the vaccination, the fetus may get affected by rubella virus as the vaccine contains live attenuated (weakened) rubella virus

(Source: Bharati Hospital and Research Centre's Paediatrics Department, Pune)

Rubella is a mild infection. Once you have had the disease, you are usually permanently immune

including growth retardation, cataracts, deafness, congenital heart defects among others.

Annually, India reports approximately 40,000 cases of CRS. "Girls should be immunized against the disease in their teens or during the child-bearing age (before they get pregnant) to avoid such deaths," the experts added.

Paediatrician Tanmany Deshpande said the Union government's move to include rubella in the immuni-

zation programme was the only way to prevent CRS, which spreads from the infected mother to the baby in the first trimester.

Senior paediatrician Sharad Agarkhedkar said, "Vaccine against rubella is available in private healthcare for over five years now in India. The vaccine was not a part of country's immunisation programme till recently. This is because rubella is a mild disease and only when it infects a pregnant woman that it can severely affect the newborn."