

PRESS RELEASE

VACCINE PETITION

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Several public health experts and Pediatric doctors led by the former Health Secretary, Dr K B Saxena have filed a public interest petition in the Delhi High Court on the introduction of “irrational vaccines” in the national immunization programme. The petition alleges that irrational vaccines are being introduced by the government at the behest of vaccine manufacturers and other vested interests while 53% of the country’s children do not get even the basic vaccines that are already a part of the immunization programme.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Technical Advisory Group of Immunisation and ICMR are the respondents in the petition.

The petition has sought:

- a stay on the introduction of Hepatitis B, Haemophilus influenzae Type B (Hib), Pneumococcal and the pentavalent vaccines until proper epidemiological studies are carried out, proper assessment of data from the country and region is complete and until clear cost-benefit analysis is done.
- directions to the government to constitute an expert body without any conflict of interest which would carry out the required studies before any vaccine is recommended for introduction in the universal immunization programme.
- direction to the government to formulate “a rule based vaccine policy that would make transparent scientific scrutiny and challenge by stakeholders possible before introducing any vaccine into the public health system”.

The petition has also sought the intervention of the court to ensure that vaccines under the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) are provided universally with full coverage without discriminating against the poor and rural 53% of the population and the funds needed for this are disbursed.

Under the EPI, six basic vaccines are provided to the children in the country: BCG, DPT, DT, TT, Measles and Polio. These vaccines cost as little as Rs. 30 per child to the exchequer. Yet they are still not made universally available and government surveys show that more than half the children (53%) are denied their basic right to immunization.

The petition alleges that the newer vaccines that the government is proposing to introduce in the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) were of doubtful efficacy,

little utility, costly, manufactured only by private sector, have unknown side effects and were being introduced without any proper study. “It is to be noted that unlike curative drugs, vaccines are given to all. Hence they need a strong economic logic and clear cost-benefit analysis that uses, inter alia, epidemiological data about the disease being sought to be prevented,” states the petition.

“In India, not only these tests are not being done, adverse studies against these new vaccines are deliberately being ignored. It is of note that the very studies that were done by the WHO to demonstrate the need for the vaccines in India showed that there was very low incidence of the disease and as such there was little sense in introducing the vaccine and these very studies were ignored in the recommendation made to GOI to introduce the vaccine. This practice of selectively ignoring studies (even those done by the ICMR with funding from the WHO) which are inconvenient, goes against the basic tenets of Evidence Based Medicine and results in promoting irrational medicine,” states the petition which gives examples of how studies are ignored and pressure is brought to bear on the government to introduce newer vaccines.

FULL TEXT PETITION