



618 stillbirths are due to bacterial infection; experts suspect goofup

Say Tetanus Has Almost Been Eliminated

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Bengaluru: The latest civil registration system (CRS) numbers on stillbirths has baffled the state's medical fraternity. The data released by the department of statistics and economics recently attributes 618 stillbirths in 2017 to tetanus, an infection caused by clostridium tetani bacteria. But medical experts say tetanus has mostly been eliminated and suggest the data is a "tabulation goofup".

CRS, which records births and deaths, put the total number of stillbirths in Karnataka in 2017 at 3,781. Casualty due to tetanus in 2017 is higher than in 2016 although the total number of stillbirths in 2016 is much higher. Foetal deaths between 20 and 28 weeks of pregnancy are termed stillbirths. Tetanus affects the nervous system and causes tightening of muscles in the body.



CRS DATA FLAW?

Shalini Rajneesh, principal secretary, government planning, programme monitoring and statistics department, suggested there could be a flaw. "Only 38% of CRS data is recorded by medical professionals," she said. "The rest is reported by non-technical persons and through oral submissions during registration of births and deaths in the 'ejanma' software. It is good that this has been brought to our notice," she added.

A KILLER OVER THE YEARS

| Year | Total stillbirths | Stillbirths attributed to tetanus |
|------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2017 | 3,781 | 618 |
| 2016 | 4,120 | 416 |
| 2015 | 4,554 | 252 |

"All pregnant women are administered the tetanus toxoid vaccine twice to protect themselves and their babies from the bacterial infection," said Dr N Raj Kumar, deputy director — child and maternal health, the department of health and family welfare. "Tetanus has almost been eliminated. There is something wrong with the CRS data."

The vaccines are administered as per national

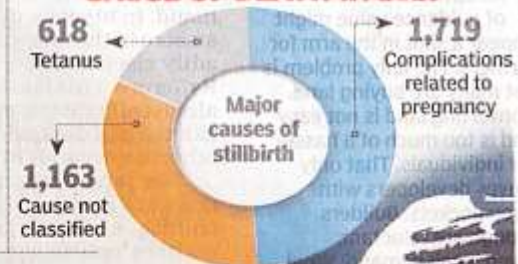
guidelines based on WHO recommendations — normally in the 20th and 24th week of pregnancy. Medical experts say the data is in conflict with maternal health data, which has no recording of tetanus infections among pregnant women.

The data shows as many as 393 stillbirths due to tetanus infection occurred between 20-24 weeks of pregnancy, 118 during 25-

29 weeks, 55 between 15-19 weeks, 47 in 30-34 weeks and five at the fag end of pregnancy (35-39 weeks). However, no district-wise data is available.

Dr Hema Divakar, president of the Federation of Obstetrics & Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI), said awareness about the vaccine is high. "Women may be unaware of high blood pressure and gestational diabetes during

TETANUS, THE THIRD MAJOR CAUSE OF DEATH IN 2017



Source: Civil registration of birth and death, department of economics and statistics

pregnancy, but even in the rural sector, every pregnant woman knows that the two injections have to be taken," she said.

She said tetanus infections could affect newborns if equipment used during delivery is unclean and if the mother is not vaccinated. "This may cause neonatal death, but the chances of a stillbirth due to tetanus are next to impossible," she added.