

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES, REGULATIONS & COORDINATION
PAKISTAN HEALTH KNOWLEDGE HUB

Success Stories

Chlorhexidine: From evidence to implementation

Integrated Reproductive Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health (IRMNCH) has remained a major concern in Pakistan with the country reporting the third highest rate of neonatal mortality in the world. This indicator has remained largely stagnant for a decade. Furthermore, according to the PDHS 2012-13 the Under 5 Mortality was 89/1000 live births. With 50% of childbirths taking place at home and more often than not attended by Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs, 72% of deliveries). These TBA attended births are often unhygienic and unsafe. In particular, cord stump management in the immediate post birth scenario constitutes a major source of sepsis and subsequent death.

In response the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination (Mo NHSRC) joined a multi-centre research and trial in 2012 to explore the use of Chlorhexidine as a suitable antiseptic to be used in the prevention of neonatal mortality. This trial was conducted in Bangladesh, Nepal as well as Pakistan. The research commenced in 2012 and uniquely the findings fed directly into a pilot program in Sindh. Basing itself on the success of this pilot, efforts to mainstream were started in the country. Considerable hurdles and bottlenecks existed in the system to mainstreaming Chlorhexidine (CHX) in the country ranging from a lack of local manufacturing to lack of requisite permission from Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) for import or registration for local production. These issues were progressively resolved by MoNHSRC in conjunction with provincial and technical partners; from DRAP registration and local production enablement, to supply support from Nepal as a stop gap measure till local production can be started.

The journey from research to implementation has been a remarkable accomplishment, especially in the post devolution scenario. The major milestones achieved include the addition of Chlorhexidine to the Essential Medicine List (EML), while permission for Chlorhexidine registration has been obtained from DRAP. Furthermore, 5 local manufacturers are now producing Chlorhexidine and mainstreaming in the market has been achieved. A standardized Chlorhexidine manual has also been developed and trainings on use to create master trainers has been undertaken for a variety of cadres, including LHWs, CMWs staff at Tertiary Care Hospitals. It is a proud achievement for Pakistan that the public sector across the country stands ready to utilize CHX to prevent neonatal sepsis due to unsafe practices. This will go a long way to address the unconscionably high NMR in the country.