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Fortified rice to be distributed in entire Gadchiroli dist soon

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Nagpur: Anaemia is a silent killer in rural India. It happens due to iron deficiency. In Maharashtra, more than 53% of children below 5 years of age are anaemic. To tackle this problem, an ambitious project — distribution of fortified rice through public distribution system (PDS) — was implemented in two blocks of Gadchiroli district from June 2018 to June 2019. After getting positive results from this pilot project, the government has decided to extend it to the entire Gadchiroli district from the upcoming rabi season.

As part of this project, paddy, procured through the district's supply department, will be milled locally and blended with fortified rice kernels and supplied to fair price shops for the next one year in all 12 blocks of Gadchiroli.

The department of food and civil supplies issued operational and technical guidelines regarding the project on August 14. Tata Trust and the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) will be funding this project. While Tata trust will be responsible for setting up of the blending machine at the rice miller identified in Gadchiroli, BPCL will help them in procuring fortified rice kernel (FRK) through its corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds.

“Gadchiroli's district collector will sign the memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Tata Trust and BPCL. After the project is implemented for one year, the state will conduct the end line evaluation. On the basis of the results of this evaluation, it will be decided whether the project will be further extended to other districts,” states the resolution issued by state government.

Distribution of fortified rice to control anaemia is practised across the globe through WHO. Rice is the main food for many people who live in low-income groups and face high prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies.

“Generally, people in rural, tribal and hilly regions do not eat enough nutrient-rich supplementary food like dal along with rice. They eat rice as it is the only affordable and accessible source of food, energy and protein for them. If they are provided with mineral-rich rice, the deficiency will be automatically recovered,” said nutritionist Nitin Todkar. Fortification of rice can replace micronutrients lost during the rice-milling process and can help compensate for dietary insufficiencies.

THE BATTLE AGAINST ANAEMIA

- * Anaemia is a deficiency of vitamin A, folic acid, Vitamin B9 and 12
- * 53.8% of the state’s children (6 months to 5 years) suffer from anaemia
- * In children between 10 to 18 years, the figure is 38%
- * 56% of pregnant women in Maharashtra are anaemic
- * Distribution of iron tabs only solution available to control anaemia
- * WHO’s concept of public distribution of fortified rice to compensate dietary insufficiencies was introduced by NITI Ayog in 2018
- * First pilot project was implemented in Kurkheda and Bhamragadh blocks of Gadchiroli in 2018
- * Next phase of the project will be implemented in all 12 blocks of Gadchoroli district with the help of Tata Trust and BPCL