

Afghan family's encounter with killer Hepatitis

HEPATITIS DAY 100 times more deadly than HIV, it can strike anyone – it hit four of this family

dotakecare

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NEW DELHI: Shah Mahmood Zadran (37) travels to India three times a year.

The Kabul resident has little choice but to travel with his son and three nephews because the children have to be treated for Hepatitis B. War-torn Afghanistan has few facilities to treat the deadly disease.

Zadran's son Naeem (13) and nephews Ibrahim (13), Samir (11) and Omar (9) were coincidentally detected with the disease at the same time at a local hospital in Kabul in 2004. The family had gone to get themselves vaccinated for Hepatitis B virus.

"I took the entire family for vaccination on advice of our doctor who suggested that we get protection as the virus is fast spreading in Pakistan and neighbouring countries," said Zadran, who said he was shocked to learn that four family members were living with the virus.

"We had noticed some signs of failing health, poor eating habits and little growth but didn't know it was because of hepatitis B."

Soon after, Zadran, who has a construction business in Kabul, consulted local doctors who advised him treatment in India, as Afghanistan did not have the support mechanism.

Neither the family nor the treating doctors know how the children contracted the virus.

Anupam Sibal, group medical director and paediatric gastroenterologist at Apollo Hospitals, said, "There are several reasons. Hepatitis B usually occurs as a result of parental contact with infected body fluids like blood transfu-



■ (From left) Naeem and his cousins Samir, Omar and Ibrahim. All the four boys have been detected with Hepatitis B.

sions or it can be a mother to baby transmission."

"If the mother is positive then she could transmit it through placenta so it is important to vaccinate the baby on birth."

They key to fighting the virus, say experts, is timely vaccination. "If one becomes infected with Hepatitis B virus the chances of being chronically infected are much higher in a child when compared to an adult," warned Dr Sibal.

Also because treatment options for children are limited and more over their efficacy is as low as 20-58 per cent.

Most drugs for children are still awaiting approvals from Food and Drug Administration (FDA), United States.

As far as the treatment of the Afghan boys is concerned, Dr Sibal said, they are all in various stages.

"One boy we've been able to treat completely. For two of them the treatment is on and the for the youngest we are

WHAT IS HEPATITIS?

- It is an inflammation of the liver, most commonly caused by a viral infection.
- There are five main hepatitis viruses, referred to as types A, B, C, D and E.
- Hepatitis A and E are typically caused by ingestion of contaminated food or water.
- Hepatitis B, C and D usually occur as a result of parental contact with infected body fluids (e.g. from blood transfusions or invasive medical procedures using contaminated equipment). Hepatitis B is also transmitted by sexual contact.

waiting for the right time as the body still has to respond to the virus which is sitting quietly in his body so far."

(The Zadran family agreed to tell their story because they said they wanted to spread awareness about the disease.)