

One citizen's effort brings immunization to villagers

In March 2017 all immunization and supplementation programs in district Nuh were stalled due to false rumors about impotency tablets and infertility injections that led to panic in the schools. According to the *Times of India* on March 9, barely any students were attending schools in the district. To address this, the district administration approached religious leaders to spread awareness about government's health programs such as the Weekly Iron and Folic Acid Supplementary (WIFS), deworming drives, and immunization program for pulse polio, small pox, measles, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DPT), and more.

A large portion of the population in Nuh did not understand the value or importance of immunizations even before the rumors were spread. With only 27.3 percent children ages 12–23 months fully immunized (DLHS, 2013), the district had the highest infant mortality rate in Haryana. The average hemoglobin level among children was far below requisite levels.

Sarjeet Sharma, a resident of village Maulaka and a father of two, has always been concerned about the erratic immunization drives in his village and often raised his concerns to others in the community. He approached the village *anganwadi* (daycare shelter) worker to no avail. He spoke to administrators at the general hospital where he was told that the auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM) was unavailable. This further added to Sarjeet's worry and desperation to protect his children. Sarjeet's mother, an avid listener of community radio *Alfaz-e-Mewat*, suggested that he share his concern over community radio. Sceptical, but willing to try anything, Sarjeet called the station and shared his concern.

Radio presenter Fakat Hussain found Sarjeet's comments while reviewing listeners' responses and **to action to coordinate** with doctors at the general hospital for their participation in a live health program to discuss issues surrounding immunization. Sarjeet participated in the live show via telephone and shared the immunization status in his village. The doctor on duty assured him of timely action to address his concerns.

Soon after the live discussion, Sarjeet received a call from the doctor seeking more details. A hospital team visited the village and, within the next two days, an extensive immunization drive was carried out.

Sarjeet was elated to witness these results. When the community radio team congratulated Sarjeet for this successful activism, he shared, "Visits to the ANM, *anganwadi* worker, and general hospital did not yield any results, so I was very sceptical when my mother suggested I approach the radio station. The radio station staff took this up and helped established a link between me and the hospital authorities. My concern reached the right ears and the right place."

(This article by Fakat Hussain, senior reporter, community radio Alfaz-e-Mewat, was translated from Hindi for this publication.)