Pneumonia

The most dangerous killer

ERSHAD KAMOL

Pneumonia has become the number one cause of under-five deaths contributing to 19 percent of such deaths all over the world. According to several studies, an estimated three million children under 5 years of age die annually due to pneumonia, despite a remarkable progress in under-five child survival strategy particularly immunisation and oral saline over the last three decades. In fact, pneumonia alone kills more children than combined deaths due to AIDS, malaria tuberculosis and measles. In Bangladesh, an estimated 80,000 children die annually from pneumonia only. According to pediatricians and health scientists, pneumonia attributes 47 percent of total under five illnesses in the country.



Professor M Abid Hossain Mollah

Streptococcus pneumoniae and Haemophilus Influenza type b (Hib) are the two major bacteria causing pneumonia in developing countries including Bangladesh. A few other virus and bacteria are also responsible for pneumonia. Pneumonia occurs when germs enter the lungs and cause inflammation there. Children who find difficulties to fight these germs are more vulnerable to acquire pneumonia.

Child specialist Professor M Abid Hossain Mollah elaborates that symptoms of the disease include fever, cough, and difficulty in breathing. "According to WHO and UNICEF guideline if the child is affected by cough and breathing problems" says Prof. Mollah, "parents must look out for two particular signs: "whether the baby is breathing faster than the normal rate and if there is indrawing of the lower part of the chest". If they find such symptoms the baby must be immediately taken to a doctor or health worker for proper diagnosis and appropriate treatment", he adds.

"Antibiotics can cure pneumonia; however, the treatment failure rate is very high because of growing resistance of the germs against the antibiotics. Many children with pneumonia die because of late arrival to the hospital or to a physician, Professor Mollah continues, "Lack of awareness of the parents about the disease is a great problem in many countries like Bangladesh. Most pneumonia cases can be treated at home with oral antibiotics. But children with severe pneumonia should be hospitalised for further evaluation, treatment with injectable antibiotics and other supportive measures particularly oxygen inhalation."