

As Air Quality Worsens, Global Scientist Urges Haryana to Lead with Mandatory Health Education for Children

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As air quality deteriorates across Northern India, posing serious health risks to children, the urgency for preventive health education has intensified. Dr Rahul Mehra, a prominent global scientist and India's National Representative for the UNESCO Chair in Global Health & Education, highlighted the opportunity for Haryana to pioneer solutions by implementing robust policy reforms, including mandatory health education for youth.



Dr Rahul Mehra, National Representative of India for the UNESCO Chair for Global Health & Education, addressing the media at Press Club in Chandigarh

"I strongly believe health education should be compulsory for children in their formative years, and towards this we have begun an experiment, and the initial results are encouraging," said **Dr Mehra**. Led by Founder & Executive Chairman Dr Mehra, Tarang Health Alliance in partnership with Fijeeha hosted a media workshop in Chandigarh to discuss the need of compulsory health education in schools of Haryana. *"Haryana's children deserve the same clean air as those in cities like Chicago, where AQI levels rarely exceed 50,"* **Dr Mehra** emphasized in the press meet *"But for our youth facing daily pollution levels upwards of 350 AQI, preventive health education can play a vital role in countering long-term health impacts and empowering the next generation to make informed health choices."*

"Haryana's success in sports demonstrates that with the right policies, our children can excel – it's time to extend this model to health education," added **Dr Navneet Anand**, Director

of Fijeeha, a development-focused communication platform.

Dr Mehra explained that, unlike treatment-based healthcare, preventive health education teaches children to adopt healthy behaviors, aiming to reduce the societal burden of health issues before they arise. Formerly a research scientist in Bio-Medical Engineering, Dr Mehra owns over 70 patents and has contributed over 100 publications.

Tarang Health Alliance's mission is ambitious yet focused, to bring health education into every classroom in India, starting with Haryana and NCR region. In partnership with the Haryana government, Tarang has also launched a pilot program in 12 government schools, supplemented by efforts in 18 private schools in the NCR region, Chandigarh, and Jaipur. *"This initiative, which covers physical, mental, and social health, aligns with the state's broader welfare programs under the guidance of Haryanas Chief Minister, Shri Nayab Singh Saini,"* said Dr Mehra.

Under this program, children learn critical health skills such as nutrition, hygiene, stress management, healthy relationships, and conflict resolution. *"Our pilot program has already shown promising results,"* Dr Mehra shared. *"Students are demonstrating a greater understanding of health topics and are making healthier choices. This shift reflects the power of a structured, curriculum-based approach to health education."*

The data from Haryana reflects the need for this intervention. Living in highly polluted environments, childrens lung capacity can be reduced by 20%, which is akin to the effects of long-term second-hand smoke exposure, according to UNICEF. Additionally, with six of the NCR cities identified as non-attainment cities by the Commission for Air Quality Management, Haryana's youth face severe health risks. *"Our goal is to reach a point where health education is not an option, but a core subject in schools,"* said **Dr Mehra**. *"We aim to have health education made compulsory for classes VI to*

VIII. These years are formative, and empowering our children with knowledge now will benefit their health, and our society, for years to come."

The program's focus on a holistic approach resonates with India's National Education Policy, which promotes a "**Swacch Bharat, Swasth Bharat**" (Clean India, Healthy India) ideal. *"Health education not only supports a child's academic growth but also nurtures their physical, mental, and social well-being,"* Dr Mehra remarked. This approach is critical in making health a lifelong value for young citizens and aligns with the country's broader vision of 'Viksit Bharat '(Developed India).

With plans to scale the program nationwide, Tarang Health Alliance is hopeful that this model will inspire other states to integrate health education into their curriculums. *"This is one of the most important investments in our country's future,"* **Dr Mehra** concluded. *"If we can establish preventive health education as a priority, we can ensure that the next generation is healthier, more informed, and better equipped to contribute to a Viksit Bharat."*

As the community stakeholders rally around this cause, there is hope that such initiatives will inspire broader policy changes, creating a ripple effect that could transform the health landscape of the nation.

About Tarang Health Alliance

Tarang Health Alliance is a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting health education and preventive healthcare across India. Since 2016, Tarang has focused on raising awareness and creating programs to improve children's physical and mental well-being. Through its advocacy for compulsory health education, Tarang seeks to shape policies that will equip children with the tools they need to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

