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Title : Need to address the problem of drinking water contaminated with high fluoride contents in Rajasthan.

DR. JYOTI MIRDHA (NAGOUR): Water is essential for all forms of growth and development in humans, animals and plants. Water problem is a common problem in whole country, but Rajasthan has worst scenario. Nearly a third of the Rajasthan state is arid and another 30 per cent semi-arid, which implies that nearly two-third of the State suffers from recurrent water scarcity. In Rajasthan 204 out of 237 blocks have been declared as dark zones.

The problem of high fluoride concentration in groundwater resources has now become one of the most important health related geo-environmental issues in Rajasthan. Rajasthan is a state where high fluoride groundwater is distributed in all the 31 districts. Nearly three million people are consuming excess fluoride-containing water. As such, the problem of both dental and skeletal fluorosis is widespread, especially in the rural population and in children. Also, 94% of all drinking water supply scheme in Rajasthan are based on groundwater. Total population affected due to excess fluoride in groundwater is 107.29 Lac. The district with highest population affected by the disease is Barmer followed by Churu, Nagaur, Bhilwara, Ajmer and Pali.

The socio-economic ramifications on the population affected by fluorosis are tremendous. High fluoride levels in drinking water sources in several parts of the State have resulted in severe stunting and congenital defects in people consuming the water.

Although there is awareness about the problem, there have been few interventions. At the national level there has been extensive research carried out on the subject. Research has resulted in improved de-fluoridation techniques. However, the initiatives undertaken in Rajasthan are few. Treatment of Fluorosis is yet to be prioritized in the health agenda.

All aspects of this health related sensitive issue should be minutely examined by the health professionals of the Government and a special status should be given to Nagaur, Barmer and Bikaner districts of Rajasthan for severe drinking water crisis.