

# Brighter side of a dark world

**According to doctors, 'preventive blindness' can be treated or controlled if tackled at the critical age — before eight years of age.**

DH NEWS SERVICE

**BANGALORE:** It is tragic to live in a dark world when there can be light. However, for half of the nine million visually-challenged population in India, this is a grim reality they live through everyday.

According to doctors, nearly 50 per cent of blindness cases could have been prevented, if it had not been for ignorance and lack of timely medical intervention.

'Preventive blindness', that are mainly seen in the pediatric age group, manifests it-

self in the form of lazy eye, squint, eye trauma, refractive errors, corneal blindness and congenital cataract.

All of the conditions can be treated or controlled if tackled at the critical age -- before eight years of age. Congenital cataract, a condition associated to most students in schools for visually challenged, can be completely cured if detected in early childhood through surgery, reveals Dr Arun Samprathi, pediatric ophthalmologist at Narayana Nethralaya.

"But if eye problems are ignored at the earlier stages, it can turn into irreversible blindness," he warns.

## Role of vaccination

The malformation of the eye, a dreadful condition

caused by the virus rubella, affecting the foetus during pregnancy, can also be avoided if proper vaccinations are taken by the mother on time. "Vaccinations against rubella should be taken before pregnancy to avoid complications in the child.

In fact, the MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccine given during infancy should be made mandatory, like the polio vaccine, to avoid such forms of blindness," suggests Dr Samprathi.

Ignorance is not limited to the poorer classes alone, points out Dr Sri Ganesh, Chairman and Managing Director of Nethradhama Superspeciality Eye Hospital. "A good number of people with preventable blindness are from rich families,

who are equally ignorant," Dr Ganesh says.

But in the world of ignorance, there is hope. Preventive blindness is now being seriously taken up by various interest groups, prime among them being the 'Vision 2020' programme of the World Health Organisation and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). Supporting them are other non-governmental organisations like Lions International and Rotary International, who are conducting awareness campaigns and detection camps across the country.

"With initiatives like Vision 2020, it will be possible that every child enjoys a right to sight within the next fifteen years," hoped Dr Ganesh.

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Applications

