

Brazilian Indian Children Get Vitamin A in Effort to Reduce Infant Mortality

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Brazil's National Health Foundation (Funasa) will begin giving some 10,000 Indian children in Xavantes tribe villages in the state of Mato Grosso megadoses of vitamin A next week.

Studies show that a vitamin A supplement increases resistance to illness. Specifically, it reduces infant mortality caused by infectious diseases, such as diarrhea.

It also reduces the chances of children having eye problems, such as night blindness.

The program gets assistance from the World Health Organization, UNICEF and FAO.

The campaign should eventually reach indigenous populations of other states too like Minas Gerais, and the coastline extending from Rio de Janeiro to Rio Grande do Sul, informed the director of the Funasa's Department of Indigenous Health, Alexandre Padilha.

"When you administer this supplement once every six months, you are able to improve the defenses of the organisms of children who suffer from malnutrition," Padilha explains.

In the state of Mato Grosso do Sul alone, around 11 thousand children between six months and five years old have received the vitamin A, which helps mainly in the prevention of lung disease and diarrhea.

Every six months they will receive a dose, administered in health posts or home visits. According to the Funasa, over 100 clinical tests have shown that this type of vitamin supplement increases immunity and decreases deaths due to contagious diseases.

Between January and April of this year, it is estimated that at least 21 Indian children died in the municipality of Dourados, in Mato Grosso do Sul, as a result of malnutrition.

According to Padilha, the Funasa has already raised the number of teams that accompany children and pregnant mothers in the villages and supervise the hospital care given to these populations.

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