Iron and vitamin A supplementation and deworming protect young children from diseases and anaemia.
Why protect young children with iron and vitamin A supplementation and deworming?

Regular consumption of foods rich in iron and vitamin A is low, particularly among infants and young children; the proportion of children 6 to 24 months old who consume vitamin A-rich foods regularly is 39 per cent while the proportion of those who consume regularly iron-rich food is 11 per cent.

The proportion of children who consume vitamin A and iron-rich foods regularly is particularly low in the lower wealth quintiles.

Vitamin A supplementation keeps children safe from death, illness and vision loss

- Children who do not have enough vitamin A in their body have lower resistance to infections and greater risk of vision damage.
- Regular intake of vitamin A supplements after six months of age can reduce death in under-fives by almost one quarter in areas where vitamin A deficiency is prevalent.

Iron supplementation and deworming protect children from anaemia

- Children who do not have enough iron in their body are at a higher risk of anaemia, which has devastating consequences for children's brain development and school performance.
- Worms in children's intestine result in loss of nutrients such as iron, which are essential for optimal growth and development.

Where are we today?

Consumption of foods rich in iron and vitamin A among children aged 6 to 35 months by wealth quintile (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>Iron-rich foods</th>
<th>Vitamin A-rich foods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NFHS-3, 2006

How to make iron and vitamin A supplementation and deworming possible for all children?

Raise awareness about the cost of inaction

- Raise awareness on the importance of universal coverage of vitamin A supplementation for the survival, health and nutrition of infants and young children.
- Raise awareness on the importance of universal coverage of iron supplementation and deworming to prevent anaemia in young children: emphasize the devastating effect of iron anaemia on children's brain development, learning ability, and future earning potential.

Improve programming, scale up interventions

- Scale up and universalize coverage of vitamin A supplementation, iron supplementation and deworming especially among the most vulnerable groups of children: the youngest, the poorest and children belonging to scheduled caste/scheduled tribe families.
- Ensure that there are no supply gaps of vitamin A and iron supplements and deworming tablets in programmes.

- Expand the use of community outreach mechanisms including Village Health and Nutrition Days to increase awareness of and demand for vitamin A and iron supplementation and deworming for infants and young children.