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DST launched programme on health & risk communication with focus on COVID-19

Conveying the authentic best practices on cutting down on the transmission of virus and its management are of paramount significance--Professor Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, DST

National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC), Department of Science & Technology (DST) has launched a programme on health and risk communication 'Year of Awareness on Science & Health (YASH)' with focus on COVID-19.

It is a comprehensive and effective science and health communication effort for promoting grass-root level appreciation and response on health and would help saving and shaping the lives of people at large, as well as build confidence, inculcate scientific temper and promote health consciousness among them.

The current pandemic scenario has posed concerns and challenges all around, where scientific awareness and health preparedness play a significant role to help combat the situation. This requires translation and usage of authentic scientific information to convey the risks involved and facilitates communities to overcome the situation. The programme will encompass development of science, health, and risk communication software, publications, audio-visual, digital platforms, folk performances, trained communicators, especially in regional languages to cater to various cross-sections of the society in the country.

Under the programme, strategies have been worked out to involve academic, research, media, and voluntary organizations to facilitate necessary actions and emergency preparedness of society to address the challenge. Planning has been done to translate and use authentic scientific and health information to communicate the risks and facilitate risk management--an effective science communication requirement for promoting community-level response. The initiative targeted at assessing public perceptions, encouraging public engagement and participation in risk-related reciprocal communication processes will open routes for building capacities, involving stakeholders and enabling communities to develop a sense of awareness, an analytical mind, change behaviours and take informed decisions regarding healthcare and associated risks.

The programme is aimed at minimizing risks at all levels with the help of public communication and outreach activities, promoting public understanding of common minimum science for community care and health safety measures like personal sanitation and hygiene, physical distancing, maintaining desired collective behaviour and so on. It also includes information dissemination mechanisms to reduce the fear of risks and build

confidence with necessary understanding for adopting sustainable healthy lifestyles and nurturing scientific culture among masses and societies.

"In the absence of vaccines and cure for COVID-19, conveying the authentic best practices on cutting down on the transmission of virus and its management are of paramount significance. In order for a widespread grass-roots impact, our communication strategies have to be multidimensional, engaging, informative and delivered with speed and scale," said Professor Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, DST.

YASH will envisage specific outcomes, like improved risk understanding amongst target groups including working with local sensitivities, belief systems, traditions, and indigenous knowledge; bringing about attitudinal changes among target groups about appreciating risks, associated challenges, solutions, and coping up the situation with courage and confidence; better working relations with community leaders, influencers including doctors, faith leaders and so on. It also encompasses improved ability to clarify misperceptions, misbeliefs as well as introduce practices based on authentic knowledge duly verified by scientific processes; trust in scientific competence of solutions and service providers.

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