Vitamin A - Targeted Supplementation

What is the issue?

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Some scientists have vouched for a targeted supplementation program for vitamin A.

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Why is Vitamin A supplementation required?

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- In the mid-1960s, prevalence of night blindness and a high mortality among infants were observed to be due to Vitamin A deficiency.
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- To address this issue, 'National Prophylaxis Programme against Nutritional Blindness due to Vitamin A Deficiency' (NPPNB due to VAD) was launched in 1970.
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- Under this program, children aged 6-60 months are administered vitamin A every six months in doses of 60 mg, as per World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations.
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- The supplementation programme is often credited for reducing childhood mortality by as much as 23% and bringing down incidence of vitamin A-associated blindness greatly.
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- Though not as severe as before, many children could be on the borderline and hence the continuance of the program is warranted even after 4 decades.
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Why is targeted intervention being discussed?

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- WHO recommended supplementation when Vitamin A deficiency is 20% or higher.
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- But, due to the high prevalence of vitamin A deficiency in the 1970s, Indian took to universal coverage for the program, irrespective of nutritional status.
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- With the scenario completely changed now, some scientists now argue for a targeted approach as a means to reduce costs and make the program more effective.
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- There have also been studies on vitamin A toxicity and related deaths due to the universal supplement program.
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- These issues and the improving nutritional standards among infants in India do call for a targeted program rather than the current model.
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Source: The Hindu

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