

# Arsenic blinds Bhojpur's babies

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**PATNA/ARA:** At least 18 babies in several hamlets of Bihar's Bhojpur district have been born blind in the past three months because their families consume groundwater containing alarming levels of arsenic, doctors have told *Hindustan Times*.

Bihar's Health Minister Nand Kishore Yadav on Wednesday confirmed the cases of blind-

ness in newborns in arsenic-affected blocks of the district but said the cause of blindness was not known.

Though more than 16 districts of Bihar have reported arsenic contamination of groundwater sources, Bhojpur emerged on top, with 1,861 parts per billion (ppb) against the World Health Organization's limit of 50 ppb.

This is the first time that blindness at birth has been

attributed to arsenic contamination, though doctors say that people using groundwater in contaminated areas suffer from cancer of the intestines, liver, kidneys and bladder and that bone deformity, gangrene and skin disorders are common.

Arsenic is an odourless and tasteless semi-metal element, which occurs naturally in the environment.

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