

Cash maternity benefit for 1st child only: Maneka

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Still in the process of finalising guidelines for the reworked maternity benefit scheme, the government has decided to limit cash incentive promised to pregnant women under the programme to her first child only.

“The scheme will cover the first child,” Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi confirmed when asked for how many live births can a pregnant woman



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Maneka Gandhi, UNION WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT MINISTER

and a lactating mother avail of ₹6,000 cash promised under the scheme Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced last year.

She said the scheme would soon see a national rollout as against 52 districts where it was previously piloted.

“The programme has tough

conditions. The cash benefit will be given in tranches to women who come for institutional deliveries and vaccinate their children fully,” Maneka said. The scheme aims to cover only women above 19 years.

While health experts welcome the move to universalise

the benefit, they find the restriction of benefit to the first live birth disappointing.

Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director, Population Foundation of India, says: “The UPA government had launched this scheme on a pilot basis in 2010 to provide partial wage compensation to women in terms of a cash incentive so they could rest before and after delivery. The incentive was meant to improve health-seeking behaviour among these women and their nutrition.

At that time the scheme provided conditional cash transfer of ₹6,000 to pregnant women above 18 years for up to two live births. But under the current expansion, the benefits have been limited. The programme has shrunk even before it has begun.”

“The current benefits run the risk of appearing as disincentives to many women who may be discouraged to undergo an institutional delivery (for the second child), putting at risk their own and the child’s life,” Muttreja said.