

MAJOR CHILD HEALTH FACTSHEET IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

OVERVIEW:

According to WHO Statistics, an estimated 6.3 million children under five died, 2.9 million of them in the WHO African Region. This is equivalent to five children under 5 years of age dying every minute. Two thirds of these deaths can be attributed to preventable causes. A third of all these deaths are in the neonatal period.

The primary causes of death in children under-5 include pneumonia, preterm birth complications, diarrhea, birth asphyxia and malaria. Approximately one third of all childhood deaths are linked to malnutrition in the African Region.

Malnutrition makes newborns and children vulnerable to both infectious and non-infectious diseases through a weakened immune system. One child dies every minute from malaria and over 90% of children living with HIV are infected through mother-to-child transmission.

Children in the Region are about 16.5 times more likely to die before the age of five than children in developed countries. Diarrheal diseases are the leading causes of preventable sickness and death among children. Breastfeeding helps prevent diarrhea and helps to build a strong immune system in newborns and young children.

While most healthy children can thrive with their natural defenses, malnutrition and children who are not exclusively breastfed can suffer compromised immune systems. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life is recommended.

Adults who were breastfed as babies often have lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, lower rates of overweight and obesity, and type 2 diabetes. Breastfeeding contributes to the health and well-being of the mother and can reduce the risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

Factsheet: Child maltreatment

Key Facts

- A quarter of all adults report having been physically abused as children.
- One in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child.
- Consequences of child maltreatment include impaired lifelong physical and mental health, and the social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development.
- Preventing child maltreatment before it starts is possible and requires a multi-sectoral approach.
- Effective prevention programs support parents and teach positive parenting skills.
- Ongoing care of children and families can reduce the risk of maltreatment reoccurring and can minimize its consequences.

Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Exposure to intimate partner violence is also sometimes included as a form of child maltreatment.

Factsheet: Pneumonia

Key facts

- Pneumonia accounts for 16% of all deaths of children under 5 years old, killing 920 136 children in 2015.
- Pneumonia can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or fungi.
- Pneumonia can be prevented by immunization, adequate nutrition, and by addressing environmental factors.
- Pneumonia caused by bacteria can be treated with antibiotics, but only one third of children with pneumonia receive the antibiotics they need.

Pneumonia is a form of acute respiratory infection that affects the lungs. The lungs are made up of small sacs called alveoli, which fill with air when a healthy person breathes. When an individual has pneumonia, the alveoli are

filled with pus and fluid, which makes breathing painful and limits oxygen intake.

Pneumonia is the single largest infectious cause of death in children worldwide. Pneumonia killed 920 136 children under the age of 5 in 2015, accounting for 16% of all deaths of children under five years old. Pneumonia affects children and families everywhere, but is most prevalent in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Children can be protected from pneumonia, it can be prevented with simple interventions, and treated with low-cost, low-tech medication and care.

Factsheet: Children -- reducing mortality

Key facts

- 5.9 million children under the age of 5 years died in 2015.
- More than half of these early child deaths are due to conditions that could be prevented or treated with access to simple, affordable interventions.
- Leading causes of death in children under 5 years are preterm birth complications, pneumonia, birth asphyxia, diarrhoea and malaria. About 45% of all child deaths are linked to malnutrition.
- Children in sub-Saharan Africa are more than 14 times more likely to die before the age of 5 than children in developed regions.

A child's risk of dying is highest in the neonatal period, the first 28 days of life. Safe childbirth and effective neonatal care are essential to prevent these deaths. 45% of child deaths under the age of 5 years take place during the neonatal period.

Preterm birth, intrapartum-related complications (birth asphyxia or lack of breathing at birth), and infections cause most neonatal deaths. From the end of the neonatal period and through the first 5 years of life, the main causes of death are pneumonia, diarrhea and malaria. Malnutrition is the underlying contributing factor in about 45% of all child deaths, making children more vulnerable to severe diseases.

Overall, substantial progress has been made towards achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4. Since 1990 the global under-5 mortality rate has dropped from 91 deaths per 1000 live births in 1990 to 43 in 2015. But the

rate of this reduction in under-5 mortalities was insufficient to reach the MDG target of a two-thirds reduction of 1990 mortality levels by the year 2015.

Factsheet: Infant and young child feeding

Key facts

- Every infant and child has the right to good nutrition according to the *"Convention on the Rights of the Child"*.
- Undernutrition is associated with 45% of child deaths.
- Globally in 2015, 156 million children under 5 were estimated to be stunted (too short for age), 50 million were estimated to be wasted (too thin for height), and 42 million were overweight or obese.
- About 43% of infants 0–6 months old are exclusively breastfed.
- Few children receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods; in many countries less than a fourth of infants 6–23 months of age meet the criteria of dietary diversity and feeding frequency that are appropriate for their age.
- Over 800 000 children's lives could be saved every year among children under 5 years, if all children 0–23 months were optimally breastfed. Breastfeeding improves IQ, school attendance, and is associated with higher income in adult life. ¹
- Improving child development and reducing health costs through breastfeeding results in economic gains for individual families as well as at the national level.

Factsheet: Diarrhoeal disease

Key facts

- Diarrheal disease is the second leading cause of death in children under five years old. It is both preventable and treatable.
- Each year diarrhea kills around 525 000 children under five.
- A significant proportion of diarrheal disease can be prevented through safe drinking-water and adequate sanitation and hygiene.
- Globally, there are nearly 1.7 billion cases of childhood diarrheal disease every year. Diarrhea is a leading cause of malnutrition in children under five years old.

Source: <https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/child-health>