

INDIA SAW 2ND-HIGHEST NUMBER OF PNEUMONIA DEATHS OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE FIVE: UN

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

A scientist holds a plate, which was coated with an antibiotic-resistant bacteria. File | Photo Credit: [Reuters](#)

India had the second-highest number of deaths of children under the age of five in 2018 due to pneumonia, a curable and preventable disease that claimed the life of one child every 39 seconds globally, according to a new report by the UN.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said that globally, pneumonia claimed the lives of more than 800,000 children under the age of five last year — or one child every 39 seconds. Most deaths occurred among children under the age of two, and almost 153,000 within the first month of life.

The report said just five countries were responsible for more than half of child pneumonia deaths: Nigeria (162,000), India (127,000), Pakistan (58,000), the Democratic Republic of Congo (40,000) and Ethiopia (32,000).

This “forgotten epidemic” is now responsible for 15% of deaths in children under the age of five, and yet, just 3% of global infectious disease research spending is allocated to the disease, the UN agency said.

In addition, the strong link between child pneumonia deaths and poverty is undeniable. Lack of access to drinking water, inadequate health care, and the burden of undernutrition and indoor air pollution are major drivers of vulnerability to the disease. Around half of all pneumonia-related deaths are associated with air pollution

Sounding the alarm about this forgotten epidemic, the UNICEF and other health and children's organisations launched an appeal for global action and will in January host world leaders at the Global Forum on Childhood Pneumonia in Spain.

“Every day, nearly 2,200 children under the age of five die from pneumonia, a curable and mostly preventable disease. Strong global commitment and increased investments are critical to the fight against this disease. Only through cost-effective protective, preventative and treatment interventions delivered to where children are will we be able to truly save millions of lives,” UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said.

Pneumonia is caused by bacteria, viruses or fungi, and leaves children fighting for breath as their lungs fill with pus and fluid. More children under the age of five died from the disease in 2018 than from any other. About 437,000 children under five died due to diarrhoea and 272,000 due to malaria.

The UN agency said that the children whose immune systems is weakened by other infections like HIV or by malnutrition, and those living in areas with high levels of air pollution and unsafe water, are at far greater risk.

While the disease can be prevented with vaccines, and easily treated with low-cost antibiotics if properly diagnosed, yet tens of millions of children are still going unvaccinated — and one in

three with symptoms do not receive essential medical care.

The report also expressed concern that children with severe cases of pneumonia may require oxygen treatment, which is rarely available in the poorest countries to the children who need it.

Only “cost-effective, protective, preventative treatment” which are able to reach children where they are “will be able to truly save millions of lives,” Fore said.

Vaccine coverage in low-income countries is now higher than the global average, CEO of the Vaccine Alliance Seth Berkley said, however, “the fact that this preventable, treatable and easily diagnosed disease” is the world’s biggest killer of youth, “is frankly quite shocking.”

“We still have work to do to ensure every child has access to this lifesaver,” he added.

The organisations are urging governments in the worst-affected countries to develop and implement pneumonia control and prevention strategies and call on richer nations and donors to boost immunisation coverage by lowering the cost of key vaccines.

An estimated 18 million more health workers are needed by 2030 to prevent, diagnose and treat pneumonia as well as to reach the Sustainable Development Goals targets for Universal Health Coverage.

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The last confirmed case of WPV3 was recorded in northern Nigeria in 2012.

Researchers have found that immune cells called microglia, which play an important role in reorganising the connections between nerve cells, fighting

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