

PRESS RELEASE

Steep drop in pneumonia deaths in last decade, but much further to go – UNICEF

NEW YORK, 12 November 2014 – Significant declines in child deaths from pneumonia prove that strategies to defeat the disease are working, UNICEF said on the fifth World Pneumonia Day. But much more is needed to stop hundreds of thousands of children from succumbing to this preventable illness each year.

Pneumonia is still among the leading killers of children – accounting for 15 per cent of deaths, or approximately 940,000 children per year – but deaths from the disease have declined by 44 per cent since 2000, according to figures released recently by UNICEF.

“Pneumonia is still a very dangerous disease – it kills more children under five than HIV/AIDS, malaria, injuries and measles combined – and though the numbers are declining, with nearly 1 million deaths a year, there is no room for complacency,” said Dr. Mickey Chopra, head of UNICEF’s global health programmes. “Poverty is the biggest risk factor, and that means our efforts need to reach every child, no matter how marginalized.”

Deaths from pneumonia are highest in poor rural communities. Household air pollution is a major cause of pneumonia, so children from households which rely on solid fuels such as wood, dung or charcoal for cooking or heating, are at high risk. Overcrowded homes also contribute to higher pneumonia levels. In addition poor children are less likely to be immunized against measles and whooping cough, which are also among major causes of the disease.

Early diagnosis and treatment of pneumonia, and access to health care, will save lives, thus strategies must target low income communities.

The increased use of pneumonia vaccines, particularly in low income countries has led to progress against the disease, but inequities exist even in countries with wide coverage.

“Closing the treatment gap between the poor and the better off is crucial to bringing down preventable deaths from pneumonia,” Dr Chopra said. “The more we focus on the causes and the known solutions, the faster we will bring this childhood scourge under control.”

UNICEF’s Supply Division has today put out a call to innovators for new, improved and more easily affordable respiratory rate timers to aid in the timely recognition and management of pneumonia.

One simple treatment has had great success: trained community health workers give sick children the antibiotic amoxicillin in a child-friendly tablet form, as part of an integrated case management programme at the community level. Scaling up the availability of similar inexpensive medicines will help to reduce the treatment gap especially among hard to reach populations.

Simple measures such as early and exclusive breastfeeding; handwashing with soap; vaccination; and provision of micronutrients will also reduce the incidence of pneumonia.

###

About UNICEF

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org.

Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

For further information please contact:

Rita Ann Wallace, UNICEF Media, Tel +1 212 326-7456, Mobile: +1 917 213-4034,
rwallace@unicef.org