

## Fact Sheet on Pneumonia – The Forgotten Killer

### What is pneumonia, and what are its symptoms?

- Pneumonia is a preventable respiratory disease that can result from an infection with a bacteria, virus, or fungus.
- A child may have pneumonia and need immediate attention if she has a cough and cold accompanied with rapid breathing, difficulty in breathing and fever.
- Children and infants suffering from other illnesses, such as AIDS or measles, are more likely to develop pneumonia.

### How many children does pneumonia affect each year?

- Pneumonia kills more children than any other illness – more than AIDS, malaria and measles combined.
- An estimated more than 150 million episodes of pneumonia occur every year among children under five in developing countries, accounting for more than 95% of all new cases worldwide.
- More than half of the total number of pneumonia episodes worldwide among children under five occur in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- Between 11 million and 20 million children with pneumonia will require hospitalisation.
- Over 2 million children under five die from pneumonia each year, accounting for nearly one in five child deaths globally.

### Did you know?

- Pneumonia is the leading killer disease of children worldwide.
- Pneumonia is a major cause of deaths in every region.
- Pneumonia can be prevented and treated.
- The danger signs of pneumonia are difficult breathing and fast breathing.
- Only half of children with pneumonia are taken to an appropriate provider.

### Why do children die from pneumonia?

- Many children die at home from pneumonia because their mothers or caregivers do not recognise the two key danger signs of pneumonia and realise the need for immediate medical care. Only about 1 in 5 caregivers knows the danger signs of pneumonia.
- Pneumonia needs urgent treatment, yet only about half of children sick with pneumonia receive appropriate medical care. Children can die quickly because of a weak immune system or malnutrition.
- Many children do not receive affordable solutions proven to prevent and control pneumonia. Governments are responsible for implementing programmes for pneumonia prevention and control, but these are often not comprehensive.

### Can pneumonia be prevented and treated?

- Child pneumonia is a solvable problem. Effective interventions for prevention and treatment are available.
- Pneumonia can be prevented through: proper nutrition (including exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding), Vitamin A supplementation, early and complete immunisation against diseases like measles, reduction of indoor pollution and frequent hand washing.
- Treating pneumonia in a timely manner can effectively reduce deaths among children under five.
- Once a child develops pneumonia, three essential steps must be taken to reduce deaths: 1. Recognise a child has the danger signs of pneumonia. 2. Seek appropriate treatment at a health clinic immediately. 3. Treat appropriately with antibiotics.

### **Why is it important to address pneumonia globally, and how can it be done?**

- Urgently addressing childhood pneumonia is critical to achieving Millennium Development Goal 4 of reducing child mortality.
- Preventing deaths due to pneumonia must begin with efforts to prevent pneumonia through interventions like routine vaccination, exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding.
- Estimates suggest that if antibiotic treatments were universally provided to children with pneumonia, around 600,000 lives could be saved each year at a cost of US \$600 million.
- If both prevention and treatment interventions to reduce pneumonia deaths were universally provided, more than one million lives could be saved.
- A coordinated, multi-faceted global effort to raise awareness of pneumonia will help ensure that it gets the much needed attention that it deserves and convince policy makers to take action.
- Stakeholders and governments need to fund, develop, implement and monitor comprehensive programs that reach children in need.

### **What are the challenges to addressing pneumonia?**

- Pneumonia is under-diagnosed and under-treated. Children can also be misdiagnosed when the symptoms overlap with other diseases they might have at the same time as well, such as malaria or diarrhoea.
- HIV and AIDS worsen pneumonia episodes in children and result in increased mortality.
- Less than half of children suffering from pneumonia receive standard medical care and treatment.
- Many people, especially those in developing countries, do not know pneumonia is the leading killer of children.
- Global health funding and interventions are often appropriated based on the public perception of threat.

*Note: Information in this fact sheet is based on resources from WHO and UNICEF.*