

Pakistan begins anti-pneumonia drive

October 9 2012

Pakistan on Tuesday launched a drive to vaccinate 5.5 million children against pneumococcal disease to fight pneumonia, which kills tens of thousands of youngsters in the country every year.

Pakistan is the first country in [South Asia](#) to launch a campaign against the disease, according to UN children's agency UNICEF, which is working with the government on the project.

More than 325,000 under-fives die in Pakistan every year, UNICEF said, and the [lung condition](#) is among the main culprits.

"Pneumonia is one of the leading killers of Pakistani children, accounting for about 19 percent of [child mortality](#)," UNICEF spokesman Zeeshan Suhail told AFP.

Zahid Larek, the head of Pakistan's expanded immunisation programme, told AFP pneumonia claimed the lives of more than 35,000 children every year.

Vaccination will begin this week in central Punjab province, which is home to around 60 percent of the country's population of around 180 million.

The southern province of Sindh and Pakistan-administered Kashmir will follow later in the year.

Confidence in vaccination programmes in Pakistan was damaged when

the CIA used a hepatitis campaign as cover for an effort to gather [DNA samples](#) in its hunt for Osama bin Laden, killed in the garrison town of Abbottabad in May 2011.

Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf has given his backing to the pneumococcal campaign to try to convince people to accept the vaccine.

Bin Laden's killing resulted in a boycott of [polio vaccination](#) in the Taliban and Al-Qaeda infested tribal region bordering Afghanistan.

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