

# UN aims to end child deaths from diarrhoea, pneumonia

April 12 2013

---

The United Nations launched a plan Friday aimed at all but eradicating childhood deaths from diarrhoea and pneumonia by 2025, in a bid to save the lives of some two million children every year.

The UN's agencies for health and children said they were joining forces with governments and other bodies to use existing low-cost methods to take on two diseases that are the leading killer of children under the age of five.

"We often call them silent killers because they don't make the news, (but they constitute) a daily emergency for children," Marilena Viviani, [UNICEF](#)'s associate director, said in Geneva ahead of the launch.

[Pneumonia](#) and diarrhoea together account for 29 percent of all deaths in children under the age of five, killing some two million a year, UNICEF and the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) said.

The diseases are closely linked to poverty, hitting children with the least access to clean water and sanitation and who are the least likely to have received vaccines that could protect them, said Viviani.

In 2011, around 711,000 cases of diarrhoea among under-fives proved fatal, a fall of 11.1 percent over the previous year, according to research published in *The Lancet* to coincide with the launch of the Global Action Plan.

There were some 1.25 million cases of [fatal pneumonia](#) in 2011, a decline of 10 percent over 2010.

Nearly 90 percent of pneumonia and diarrhoea deaths in children occur in sub-Saharan Africa and [South Asia](#).

The plan aims to cut the number of childhood deaths from diarrhoea to just one in 1,000 [live births](#) and childhood deaths from pneumonia to less than three in 1,000 by 2025.

"And we believe that in a further 10 years we should be able to have no deaths from diarrhoea and pneumonia," said Elizabeth Mason, who heads WHO's maternal, newborn, [child and adolescent health](#) division.

Richer countries have shown that a few things are key to reducing infections and deaths from both diseases, including breastfeeding, [good nutrition](#) and a clean environment, as well as access to the right medicines and vaccines.

In addition to eradicating most childhood deaths from diarrhoea and pneumonia, the plan aims to slash the incidence of severe cases of both by 75 percent and to cut the number of children stunted by them by 40 percent by 2025, compared to 2010 figures.

To meet the targets, 90 percent of kids must have access to antibiotics for pneumonia and oral rehydration salts for diarrhoea, up from current levels of 31 and 35 percent respectively, the UN agencies said.

The plan also calls for at least half of children to be exclusively breastfed for six months, for improved sanitation and safe drinking water for all children and 90-percent coverage with new vaccines against pneumococcal bacteria and rotavirus.

The scheme will require \$2.9 billion (2.2 billion euros), but Mason said the bill was not so daunting when spread among the some 75 countries with the highest death rates.

"For a relatively small amount, you can actually have a huge impact," she said.

(c) 2013 AFP

Citation: UN aims to end child deaths from diarrhoea, pneumonia (2013, April 12) retrieved 25 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-04-aims-child-deaths-diarrhoea-pneumonia.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.