

WHO report: Young kids at high risk for foodborne illness death

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New World Health Organization (WHO) global estimates of foodborne diseases find one in 10 people now get sick from contaminated food each year, and children under 5 years of age are at high risk of death from the disease.

"This is sobering news," says Dr. Pritish Tosh, a Mayo Clinic infectious diseases expert. "It puts into perspective how big the problems of clean water and sanitation are around the world."

Key statistics in the new report include:

- 600 million people worldwide fall ill from [foodborne illnesses](#) every year
- 420,000 people worldwide die from eating [contaminated food](#) every year
- Children under 5 years of age are at particularly [high risk](#) for death, with 125,000 dying every year
- Africa and Southeast Asia have the highest burden of foodborne diseases

The WHO report says the risk of foodborne diseases is most severe in low- and middle-income countries. It is linked to a number of factors,

including preparing [food](#) with unsafe water, poor hygiene and inadequate conditions in food production and storage.

"The issues of sanitation are really quite vast," says Dr. Tosh. "The combination of water and food being contaminated with microorganisms, especially pathogens, can cause severe problems."

Dr. Tosh says the solution involves improving public health infrastructures and making basic health care accessible to more people in developing countries. "Without it, the most vulnerable, namely the very young, the very old and the sick, are the ones who are going to take the brunt of the disease."

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