

Virus impact could kill over 50,000 children in MENA: UN

June 15 2020

UN agencies warned Monday that the coronavirus pandemic could lead to the deaths of an additional 51,000 under-fives in the Middle East and North Africa by the end of the year.

The World Health Organisation and United Nations children's agency UNICEF said the disruption of essential health and nutrition services risked "reversing progress (on) [child survival](#) in the region by nearly two decades".

"While we do not have many cases of COVID-19 among children in the region, it is evident that the pandemic is affecting children's health firsthand," the agencies warned.

"An additional 51,000 children under the age of five might die in the region by the end of 2020" in the case of rising malnutrition and a protracted lack of access to vaccinations and treatment for childhood diseases.

Such a number of extra deaths would represent an increase of almost 40 percent over pre-COVID-19 figures, they said in a joint statement issued in Amman.

The agencies called for a "full and safe resumption" of essential immunisation campaigns and nutrition services, following "strict precautionary measures for infection prevention".

The agencies cited overstretched [health facilities](#) with little personal protective equipment, [economic hardships](#) and parents' fears of contracting the COVID-19 illness at [health clinics](#) among factors that could cause a huge rise in child deaths.

"But we can avoid this scenario, allowing tens of thousands of children to celebrate their fifth birthday surrounded by their families and friends," they said.

They urged authorities to work "to increase trust in public health systems and promote appropriate care-seeking behaviours among families".

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Citation: Virus impact could kill over 50,000 children in MENA: UN (2020, June 15) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-virus-impact-children-mena.html>

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