

Pneumonia Factsheet

(last updated: October 2016)

What is pneumonia?

- Pneumonia is a form of acute respiratory infection that causes inflammation or fluid in the lungs. It makes breathing difficult and limits oxygen intake.¹
- Symptoms of pneumonia include cough, difficulty breathing, fast breathing, chest in-drawing and/or wheezing. If infants are severely ill, they may also be unable to eat or drink and may experience unconsciousness, convulsions, and even death.¹
- In children, the most common bacterial causes of pneumonia are pneumococcus and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib); the most common viral cause is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).¹

Who does it most affect?

- Pneumonia is the #1 infectious cause of death for children under age 5 globally, killing an estimated 920,000 children in 2015.² That's more than 2,500 young lives per day.
- Pneumonia causes 16% of all deaths in children under age 5 worldwide.³
- People at any age can contract pneumonia. However, the most at-risk are children under the age of 5 and individuals with weakened immune systems.
- Children in poor and rural communities are most affected.

What progress has been made?

- Between 2000 and 2015, annual global child deaths due to pneumonia dropped from 1.7 million to an estimated 920,000.⁴

How can pneumonia be controlled?

- Controlling childhood pneumonia requires correct and consistent delivery of an integrated package of interventions to protect children and prevent and treat the disease.
- Many of the interventions targeted at pneumonia also help control other childhood illnesses, such as diarrhea and malnutrition, and should be part of a comprehensive approach to child survival.

¹ WHO. (2016). Pneumonia Fact Sheet. Accessed on 17 October 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs331/en/index.html>

² UNICEF. (2015). Estimates of child cause of death, acute respiratory infection. Data as of December 2015. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/child-health/pneumonia.html>

³ UNICEF. (2015). Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed. Progress Report 2015. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/APR_2015_9_Sep_15.pdf

⁴ UNICEF. (2015). Pneumonia: Current Status and Progress. Retrieved from <http://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/pneumonia/>

⁵ WHO. (2016). Household air pollution and health. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs292/en/>

⁶ United Nations. (2012) UN Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children Report. Retrieved from http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/images/UN_Commission_Report_September_2012_Final.pdf



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PROTECT

Healthy practices start from birth.

- Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life boosts children's natural defenses.
- Adequate nutrition and vitamin A supplementation help to ensure a well-functioning immune system and lower the risk of pneumonia and other diseases.



PREVENT

Vaccines shield children from some of the deadliest causes of pneumonia.

- Immunization against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), pneumococcus, measles and whooping cough can prevent cases of pneumonia from ever occurring.
- Access to clean water, sanitation and hand-washing with soap help prevent exposure to pathogens that cause pneumonia.
- HIV prevention stops opportunistic pneumonia infections that affect weakened immune systems.
- Globally, more than 50% of pneumonia deaths among children under 5 are linked to household air pollution.⁵



TREAT

Families need timely access to affordable health care.

- Pneumonia is most often detected by symptoms that may include fever, cough and fast or strained breathing.
- Radiography and laboratory tests can be helpful in confirming pneumonia and identifying the organism causing it. However, use of chest x-ray, blood culture and other tests is limited by cost and technical challenges in many areas of the world.
- Health workers can use a pulse oximeter to assess the level of oxygen in the blood and provide lifesaving oxygen therapy.
- Effective, integrated case management strategies and improving care-seeking behavior ensure that children receive proper and timely diagnosis and treatment.
- WHO recommends amoxicillin dispersible tablets as the only first-line treatment for children under age 5 diagnosed with pneumonia, costing about \$0.21-0.42 USD per treatment course.⁶

