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Leading Organizations Join Forces to Launch First Annual World Pneumonia Day, Fight World's Leading Child Killer

WHO and UNICEF Release Global Action Plan to Combat Pneumonia as Part of Historic Effort

*"Resources and political will are standing between children and their futures,"
Write Senator Bill Frist and Rwandan Minister of Health Dr. Richard Sezibera*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (November 2, 2009) – Nearly 100 leading global health organizations from around the world joined forces today to recognize the first-annual World Pneumonia Day and urge governments to take steps to fight pneumonia, the world's leading killer of young children. The first steps in this fight are outlined in the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia, released today by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF.

"It surprises most people to learn that pneumonia kills more children than any other disease – taking more than 2 million young lives annually," write former U.S. Senate Majority Leader and Save the Children Board member, Bill Frist, MD and co-author Dr. Richard Sezibera, Rwanda's Minister of Health in this week's edition of *The Lancet*. "Nearly half of these deaths could be prevented with existing vaccines and the vast majority of cases could be treated with inexpensive antibiotics. Yet, lives continue to be lost from this preventable and treatable disease, and, until recently, there was very little outcry."

Pneumonia takes the lives of more children under 5 than measles, malaria, and AIDS combined. The disease takes the life of one child every 15 seconds, and accounts for 20% of all deaths of children under 5 worldwide. While pneumonia affects children and families everywhere, it has the most deadly impact in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where 98% of pneumonia deaths occur. It can be prevented with simple interventions, and treated with low-cost, low-tech medication and care.

"Today the world is coming together like never before to address the number one threat to the world's children," said Orin Levine, executive director of PneumoADIP at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Together we call on country governments to implement life-saving pneumonia interventions for those that need them most."

Global Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Pneumonia

The Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia (GAPP), released today by WHO and UNICEF, outlines a six-year plan for the worldwide scale-up of a comprehensive set of interventions to control

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the disease. Countries are urged to implement a three-pronged pneumonia control strategy that:

- *protects* children by promoting exclusive breastfeeding and ensuring adequate nutrition and good hygiene;
- *prevents* the disease by vaccinating them against common causes of pneumonia such as *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcal disease) and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib); and
- *treats* children at the community level and in clinics and hospitals through effective case management and with an appropriate course of antibiotics.

The GAPP estimates the cost of scaling up exclusive breastfeeding, vaccinations and case management in the world's 68 high child mortality countries. Together, these countries account for 98% pneumonia deaths worldwide. With this investment, the GAPP projects that by 2015, the scale-up of existing interventions can decrease child pneumonia mortality substantially.

Ensuring Treatment, Achieving Prevention

Studies show that implementing pneumonia prevention and treatment interventions worldwide could save more than one million lives each year and significantly reduce the burden of families and communities that must cope with pneumonia-related illnesses and deaths. Pneumonia can be treated effectively with antibiotics that cost less than a dollar, but less than 20% of children with pneumonia receive the antibiotics they need, according to WHO.

Safe and effective vaccines exist to provide protection against the primary causes of pneumonia, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcal disease) and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib). However, use of Hib vaccine has only recently expanded to low-income countries and pneumococcal vaccine is not yet included in national immunization programs in the developing world, where children bear the highest risk for pneumonia and where most pneumonia-related child deaths occur.

As the result of collaborative efforts by WHO, UNICEF, the GAVI Alliance, academia, foundations, vaccine manufacturers, and donor and developing country governments, low-income countries can now access existing and future pneumococcal vaccines with a small self-financed contribution of as little as US \$0.15 per dose. To date, 11 countries have received GAVI Alliance approval for support to introduce pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) and 12 additional countries have submitted applications.

"For the first time in history, we have the commitment from countries and the tools and systems in place to deliver new life-saving vaccines to protect millions of children against the world's biggest childhood killer pneumonia," said Dr. Julian Lob-Levyt, CEO of the GAVI Alliance. "With increased donor support, we can save many more lives and make an incredible leap in progress towards further reducing child mortality in the world. This is an historic opportunity we must not ignore."

World Pneumonia Day: A Global Effort

The Global Coalition against Childhood Pneumonia, made up of nearly 100 influential global health organizations has led the World Pneumonia Day effort. Events are taking place in more than 25 countries around the world.

"Pneumonia takes a devastating toll on families and communities in resource-poor countries, so it is vitally important that this message be amplified throughout the developing world," said Mary Beth Powers, chief of Save the Children's Survive to 5 campaign. "The involvement of these countries in this effort is an important step toward reducing pneumonia deaths."

World Pneumonia Day events and activities will raise awareness, outline solutions and call upon governments to act to combat pneumonia. In New York City, more than 100 leaders in science, politics and global health will gather for the first World Pneumonia Day Summit. Other activities will include week-long activities in Nigeria including educational events, policy briefings and rallies; a policymaker roundtable and symposium in

Bangladesh; a Run for Survival in Kenya; pediatrician workshops in Nepal; a health symposium in the Philippines; and a briefing in London at the House of Commons. Additional events are planned in China, the DRC, Ethiopia, India, Malawi, Mali, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Uganda. An event list can be found at <http://worldpneumoniaday.org/events/upcoming-events/>. These events all underscore the need for urgent action to protect the lives of children everywhere.

“We live in a world with infinite possibilities,” write Frist and Sezibera. “Hearts are transplanted, DNA is decoded, and new medical advances are made every day. Yet we continue to be stymied by how best to reach those in resource-poor settings with the most basic care and medicines that we take for granted.” They continue, “Resources and political will are standing between children and their futures. With the right tools, we should not fail the next generation of leaders and doctors.”

To learn more about World Pneumonia Day and the Global Coalition against Child Pneumonia, visit <http://worldpneumoniaday.org>. To download the Global Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Pneumonia, visit http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2009/WHO_FCH_CAH_NCH_09.04_eng.pdf.

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About The Global Coalition against Child Pneumonia

The Global Coalition against Child Pneumonia and the World Pneumonia Day Coalition, was established in April 2009. It seeks to bring focus on pneumonia as a public health issue and to prevent the millions of avoidable deaths from pneumonia that occur each year. The coalition is grounded in a network of international government, non-governmental and community-based organizations, research and academic institutions, foundations, and individuals that have united to bring much-needed attention to pneumonia among donors, policy makers, health care professionals, and the general public. Learn more at www.worldpneumoniaday.org