



Child Health Leaders Call for Day to Unite Against Pneumonia, World's Top Child Killer

Pneumonia is world's most neglected disease, kills more than 2 million children annually

Baltimore, MD (April 7, 2009) – Child health groups united with Save the Children Artist Ambassadors Gwyneth Paltrow and Hugh Laurie today to establish an annual World Pneumonia Day on November 2, 2009. The day will mobilize efforts to fight a neglected disease that kills more than two million children under the age of five each year worldwide.

Many people are unaware of pneumonia's overwhelming death toll. Pneumonia has been overshadowed as a priority on the global health agenda, and rarely receives coverage in news media. World Pneumonia Day will help bring this health crisis to the public's attention and will encourage policy makers and grass roots organizers alike to combat the disease.

"Pneumonia is the world's number one killer of children. But with new vaccines, early diagnosis and proper treatment with antibiotics that cost less than a dollar, a child's health can improve and lives can be saved," said Charles MacCormack, president and CEO of Save the Children.

Pneumonia kills more children than AIDS, malaria and measles combined. UNICEF and WHO estimate that pneumonia accounts for nearly 1 out of 5 deaths in children under five years old. For each child who dies from pneumonia in an industrialized country, more than 2000 children die from pneumonia in developing countries.

"In wealthier countries, we don't often see life-threatening child pneumonia. It's easy to forget that around the world, pneumonia is still killing more than 5500 kids every day," said Dr. Orin Levine, a pneumonia expert and associate professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Pneumonia is both common and extremely serious, but with existing tools like vaccines and antibiotics, we can save more than a million children every year."

In addition to killing more than two million children a year, pneumonia causes severe financial difficulties and emotional burden for families and communities and contributes to the cycle of poverty. Few caregivers can recognize pneumonia symptoms. Consequently, less than one third of children suffering from pneumonia receive antibiotics, which are available for less than US\$1.

“We have what it takes to prevent and cure childhood pneumonia. Yet the disease tragically claims more than two million babies and toddlers every year,” said actress and Save the Children Artist Ambassador Gwyneth Paltrow. “We can stand on the sides and continue to watch this tragedy unfold or we can step in and change the ending. World Pneumonia Day gives everyone the chance to act.”

Preventing pneumonia is critical to reducing deaths. Research shows that a package of health measures provided globally, especially to the poorest communities, could dramatically cut childhood deaths from pneumonia.

Vaccines against two of pneumonia’s common bacterial causes, Hib (Haemophilus Influenzae type B) and pneumococcus, have prevented many deaths in industrialized countries. The GAVI Alliance, an international partnership devoted to improving child health, has helped low-income countries introduce Hib and pneumococcal vaccines within their public vaccination programs.

Other proven, low-cost techniques include exclusive breast feeding for six months, ensuring good nutrition, reducing indoor air pollution, using antibiotics, washing hands, and preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Additionally, many children do not get the care they need, making education of parents and health providers a priority so they better understand the necessity of preventative measures. Health workers must be trained to diagnose pneumonia and must be equipped with a steady supply of quality antibiotics for treatment.

"I work on a TV show that features the unusual, the bizarre, the unique. But the cases on *House* are brightly-colored minnows compared to the leviathan of pneumonia," said actor and Save the Children Artist Ambassador Hugh Laurie. "It's so big, you couldn't make a TV show about it. But you could change it. So could I. We can and must change it."

Fighting pneumonia is a critical strategy for countries working to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, which include a goal to reduce under-5 child deaths by two-thirds from the 1990 level.

“We have been fooled too long ignoring this disease. Children dying of pneumonia may be living in poor countries but these are not lesser lives. We must do all we can to take care of all children,” said Lance Laifer, founder of Hedge Funds vs. Malaria & Pneumonia. “Our complacency ends today. We won’t let millions of children gasping their last breath go unnoticed by the world.”

JOIN THE FIGHT

Save the Children, PneumoADIP at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Hedge Funds vs. Malaria & Pneumonia, and the GAVI Alliance

have joined with Save the Children Artist Ambassadors Gwyneth Paltrow and Hugh Laurie to increase awareness about and investments in prevention, diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

- Log on to <http://www.WorldPneumoniaDay.org> to sign up to receive email updates about World Pneumonia Day.
- Learn more about what causes pneumonia and how we can fight back.
- Join the movement on Facebook at <http://tinyurl.com/WorldPneumoniaDay>
#

PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

Save the Children is the leading, independent organization creating lasting change for children in need in the United States and around the world. For more than 75 years, Save the Children has been helping children survive and thrive by improving their health, education and economic opportunities and, in times of acute crisis, mobilizing lifesaving assistance to help children recover from the effects of war, conflict and natural disasters. For more information, visit:

www.savethechildren.org

PneumoADIP is a dedicated team of experts and specialists based at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health supported by a \$30 million grant from the GAVI Alliance (GAVI). PneumoADIP's mission is to improve child survival and health by accelerating the evaluation of and access to, new life-saving pneumococcal vaccines for the world's children. To learn more, please visit www.preventpneumo.org.

About Hedge Funds vs. Malaria & Pneumonia (formerly Hedge Funds vs. Malaria): Hedge Funds vs. Malaria & Pneumonia's mission is to create grassroots support to end easily preventable and treatable deaths due to malaria, pneumonia and other diseases and to help improve the lives of those saved through education and economic development. Hedge Funds vs. Malaria & Pneumonia is a 100% volunteer organization, is not a 501c3 and has no expenses. All the funds it helps collect are used to help other organizations.

The GAVI Alliance (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) saves children's lives and protects people's health by increasing access to immunization in poor countries. Since 2000 GAVI has vaccinated more than 213 million children and committed \$4 billion to the 72 poorest countries, home to half the world's people.

Media Contacts

Eileen Burke, eburke@savechildren.org, 203-221-4233

Lois Privor-Dumm, lprivord@jhsphe.edu, 410-502-4292

Lindsay Crouse, lcrouse@ghstrat.com, 646-862-1817

Jeffrey Rowland, jrowland@gavialliance.org, +41-79-240-4559