

Pneumonia, diarrhea are top killers of kids: UNICEF

8 June 2012

Pneumonia and diarrhea are among the top causes of childhood deaths around the world, particularly among the poor, said a report out Friday by the UN Children's Fund.

UNICEF said that while these two diseases kill more than two million children each year, making up 29 percent of [child deaths](#) under age five worldwide, some simple interventions could save lots of lives in the coming years.

The report urges the 75 countries with the highest [mortality rates](#) to aim to treat poor children with diarrhea and pneumonia the same way they do those from the top 20 percent of households, a so-called "equity approach."

Key interventions include vaccinating against the major causes of pneumonia and diarrhea, encouraging infant breastfeeding, improving access to clean water and sanitation, offering antibiotics for pneumonia and [rehydration](#) solutions for diarrhea.

"Modeled estimates suggest that by 2015 more than two million child deaths due to pneumonia and diarrhea could be averted across the 75 countries with the highest mortality burden," said the report.

"If national coverage of key pneumonia and diarrhea interventions were raised to the level in the richest 20 percent of households in each country," it added.

About half of childhood deaths in the world due to diarrhea or pneumonia take place in five countries: India, Nigeria, [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), Pakistan and Ethiopia, said the report.

There has been some progress in offering vaccines against Hemophilus influenza type b, as well as pneumococcal conjugate vaccines and rotavirus vaccines in the [poorest countries](#), but

more effort is needed, it said.

Water and sanitation is another key hurdle, with 783 million people globally not using an improved drinking water source, and 2.5 billion not using [sanitation facilities](#).

"Nearly 90 percent of deaths due to diarrhea worldwide have been attributed to unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene," said the report.

"[Hand washing](#) with water and soap, in particular, is among the most cost-effective health interventions to reduce the incidence of both childhood pneumonia and diarrhea."

Pneumonia is responsible for 18 percent of childhood deaths worldwide each year, and diarrhea is linked to 11 percent.

In contrast, AIDS is responsible for two percent of global childhood deaths annually and malaria for seven percent, according to the report.

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