



Save the Children

# FIGHTING FOR BREATH IN SOUTH AFRICA

A call to action on  
childhood pneumonia

## WHY ARE CHILDREN DYING OF PNEUMONIA AROUND THE WORLD?

- A child who is severely malnourished is four times more likely to die from pneumonia. Globally, 51 million children suffered from wasting, and they face grave health risks (2017).
- Pneumococcal vaccines (PCVs) could prevent most bacterial pneumonia cases. Globally, 76 million children aged 12-23 months are unimmunised (2017).
- One-third of children with pneumonia-like symptoms do not seek appropriate care.
- Antibiotics which could prevent 70% of all pneumonia deaths, costing just \$0.50 on average, are frequently not accessible and often unavailable.
- Poor children are most at risk from pneumonia but health systems disproportionately provide for wealthier children.

**Pneumonia claims the lives of more children around the world than any other infectious disease. The vast majority of those killed by pneumonia are poor and living in low and middle income countries.**

880,000 children under five died of pneumonia in 2016. That's almost two fatalities every minute of every day - more than diarrhoea, malaria and measles combined. Most of the deaths happen in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Over 80% occur among children under two, many of them in the first weeks of life. This is a disease that leaves children gasping for breath and fighting for life.

### Strengthening Primary Health Care (PHC)

Every nation should make it a priority to ensure strong, accessible primary health care systems for all communities. For effective prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment of pneumonia, health care systems must be free for patients. They must have trained community health workers; adequately supplied facilities; cold chain and transport for vaccines so everyone can have access to immunisation; and referral systems must be swift for children with severe

pneumonia. Health plans should also include interventions to improve the overall health of children. Their vulnerability to pneumonia can be reduced by combating undernutrition, by protecting, promoting, and supporting exclusive breastfeeding, and by encouraging care seeking behaviour.

### Progressing towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) to combat pneumonia

Pneumonia cannot be treated in isolation. Tackling pneumonia requires a strong and accessible health system that reaches the most disadvantaged children. Governments need to make quality primary health care for every community the foundation and priority for progressing towards UHC. All countries, irrespective of income level, can and should make progress towards UHC; expanding reach, services, and the extent of financial protection for the poorest people/families. The path countries take will differ but all must ensure equitable access without discrimination. Pneumonia prevention, management and treatment should be part of an integrated maternal and child health continuum of care which can be delivered by a strong PHC system that should be the foundation and priority for UHC.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

- Promote universal use and scale up of the Road to Health Booklet (RTHB) and encourage health workers to fully utilise the tool to achieve its main objectives of building stronger links between patients and healthcare workers.
- Implement the proposals in the RTHB which will enable health workers to improve monitoring children's growth indicators, identify issues such as pneumonia at an earlier stage, and for them to document health and nutritional interventions and milestones for children under-five.
- Ensure that national DHIS reports regularly with accurate data on childhood pneumonia deaths and standardises recording and reporting mechanisms at national, provincial, and district levels, using data as evidence to plan effectively.
- Increase national investment in immunisation infrastructure to expand the reach and quality of health system delivery, with a sharpened focus on equity.
- Develop comprehensive national guidelines and multi-sectoral convergent action plans for tackling pneumonia and ensure adequate resourcing for implementation at all levels and accelerate the introduction and expansion of new technologies for pneumonia diagnosis.
- Reduce vulnerability to pneumonia by promoting the importance of clean cooking fuels, improving ventilation in homes, healthy nutrition practices such as breast feeding, safe drinking water, toilet use, hand washing and sanitation.

# KEY PNEUMONIA FACTS FOR SOUTH AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

Pneumonia killed

**8,441**

children under five in 2016  
– more than 23 children  
every day.

More than

**454,000**

children aged 12-23 months  
were not immunised with  
PCV in 2017.

**88%**

children with pneumonia  
symptoms were taken to  
a health facility in 2016.

## UHC TO COMBAT PNEUMONIA

HEALTH OUTCOMES

**25** per 1000 live births is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) target rate for under five deaths by 2030.



**3** per 1000 live births is the target pneumonia death rate for under fives by 2025, as envisaged under the Global Action Plan for Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (GAPPD).



NUTRITION

As per the 2025 targets set in the 2012 World Health Assembly Resolution, the vital steps towards ending malnutrition by 2030 are:



**40%** reduction in stunting in children under five.

**5%** or less wasting prevalence in children under five.



**50%** exclusive breastfeeding rate for the first 6 months.

IMMUNISATION

**90%** national and at least **80%** district or equivalent administrative unit coverage for vaccination by 2020 as per the Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP).



**Hib** (Haemophilus influenzae type B) vaccine and **PCV** included in the national immunisation programme.



PAYING FOR HEALTHCARE

**\$86** is the minimum recommended government spend/person/year to provide essential health services as per WHO recommendations.



**5%** is the minimum recommended government spend on health as % of GDP as per WHO recommendations.

The SDG targets for large out of pocket (OOP) expenditure should not be more than



**10%** and to avert catastrophic OOP expenditure it should not be more than

**25%** of total household expenditure or income.

## SPOTLIGHT ON SOUTH AFRICA<sup>2</sup>

**37** per 1000 live births, under five mortality rate in South Africa in 2017.

**7** per 1000 live births, under five mortality rate in South Africa due to pneumonia in 2016.

**17%** of all under five mortality is due to pneumonia in 2016.

**27%** stunting rate in 2016. To remain on track to achieve SDG 2 in 2030, South Africa needs to reduce stunting rates to **16%** by 2025.

**3%** wasting prevalence in children under five in 2016.

**32%** exclusive breastfeeding rate in 2016.

**66%** national rate in 2017 based on DTP3 coverage.

**66%** Hib vaccine coverage among 1 year olds in 2017.

**60%** PCV coverage among 1 year olds in 2017.

**\$252** spent by the government on health per person in 2015.

**14%** of the government's budget spent on health in 2015.

**4.4%** of GDP spent on health by the government in 2015.

**8%** of total health expenditure was out-of-pocket in 2015.

<sup>1</sup> Key facts: WHO Global Health observatory

<sup>2</sup> Health outcomes: UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation/recent household survey via GRID; WHO Global Health observatory Nutrition: WHO/UNICEF/World Bank Joint Malnutrition Estimates; WHO Tracking Tool for Global Targets 2025; UNICEF Data on infant and young child feeding (breastfeeding) Immunisation: WHO/UNICEF estimates of national immunization coverage Paying for health care: WHO Global Health Expenditure database