

Pneumococcal disease

Pneumococcal disease causes a broad range of infections in all populations around the world. It takes the lives of more than a million people every year – including more than half a million children before their fifth birthday. The vast majority of these deaths occur in developing countries.

Quick facts

- The bacterium responsible for the disease – the pneumococcus – has 90 strains or serotypes and can cause life-threatening infections like pneumonia, meningitis or sepsis (serious blood infection).
- People who have a weakened immune system due to malnutrition, HIV/AIDS or sickle cell anemia are at greater risk of contracting severe pneumococcal infections.
- Pneumonia is the most common form of serious pneumococcal disease and accounts for 18% of child deaths in developing countries, making it one of the two leading causes of death among young children.

Prevention strategies

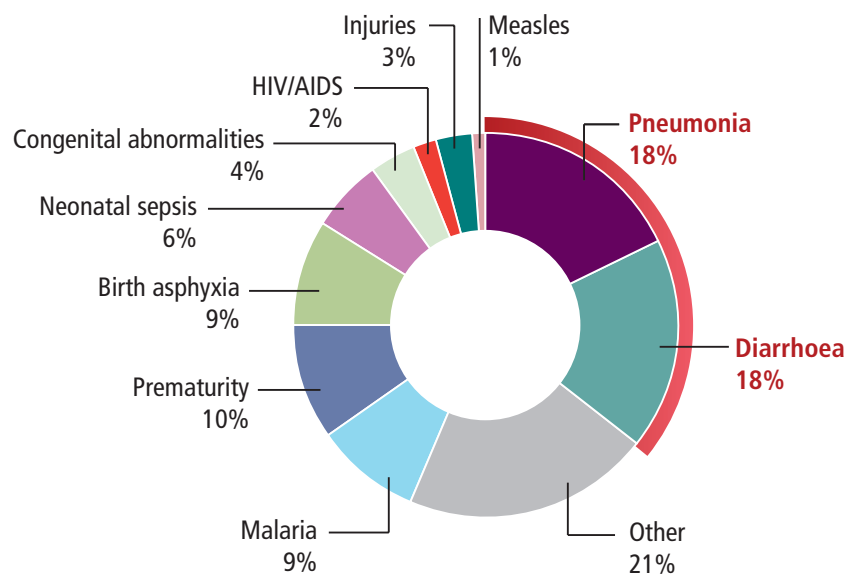
In 2009, WHO and UNICEF launched the *Global action plan for the prevention and control of pneumonia* (GAPP). The aim is to accelerate pneumonia control with a combination of interventions to protect, prevent, and treat pneumonia in children. This includes promoting breastfeeding, hand washing and reduced indoor air pollution, preventing illness through immunisation and ensuring access to the right kind of treatment.

The most effective prevention is to ensure that all children have access to safe, affordable and appropriate vaccines. This was recognised in the 2007 WHO recommendation that pneumococcal vaccines be introduced into all national immunisation programmes, particularly in countries with high child mortality.

The GAVI Alliance has committed to support the introduction of pneumococcal vaccines in 37 developing countries in the coming years and plans to roll them out to nearly 60 countries by 2015.

Africa and Asia account for more deaths from pneumococcal disease than anywhere else in the world and so are key targets for accelerating access.

Causes of under-five child deaths in low-income countries



New vaccines against pneumococcal disease

A first vaccine against pneumococcal disease was made available in the United States in 2001 but only contained the serotypes prevalent in industrialised countries, not serotypes more prevalent in developing countries. New and sophisticated vaccines that protect against more serotypes are now available. 10- and 13-valent vaccines protect children against the serotypes most prevalent in developing countries and can prevent more than 70% of childhood pneumococcal disease in Africa.

“Every child must be reached, because every child counts”

Dagfinn Høybråten, Chair of the GAVI Alliance Board

Rolling out in developing countries

The global introduction of pneumococcal vaccination marks an historic milestone in global health as these new vaccines have been made accessible in record time to children in the world's poorest countries. Today, GAVI-eligible countries are introducing pneumococcal vaccines faster than ever before.

These vaccines offer the world an unprecedented opportunity to significantly reduce child mortality: by rapidly scaling up roll-out to nearly 60 countries, GAVI and its partners could avert over 650,000 deaths by 2015 and up to 7 million deaths by 2030.

These preventive efforts are critical in countries with limited access to health care facilities, especially when a child born in one of these countries is 17 times more likely to die before reaching the age of five when compared with a child from a high-income country.

Nicaragua, Guyana, Sierra Leone, Yemen, Kenya, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Honduras, Central African Republic, Benin, and Cameroon are among the first GAVI-eligible countries to introduce pneumococcal vaccines as part of their national routine immunisation programmes.

A wise investment

Immunisation is one of the most cost-effective investments to decrease poverty and prevent longer term economic and social costs.

With the contributions it receives from governments, foundations and other philanthropists – and with the help of innovative finance mechanisms such as the Advance Market Commitment (AMC) – the GAVI Alliance is making these new pneumococcal vaccines available for children in the world's poorest countries at a fraction of the price charged in industrialised countries. The long-term price of US\$ 3.50 is more than a 90% reduction compared with the same vaccines being sold in Europe and the United States.

Kenya celebrates pneumococcal vaccine rollout

Kenyan mothers' happiness at seeing their children receive the life-saving pneumococcal vaccination reflects the success of the Health Ministry's 'Stop Pneumonia. There is a solution' campaign, which has helped raise national awareness of pneumonia. The pneumococcal vaccine was introduced in Kenya in January 2011 and the country targets 85% pneumococcal vaccine coverage by 2012.

The roll-out of the pneumococcal vaccine has become a reality across the world, allowing developing country governments to reduce deaths and enable millions of children to grow up healthy.



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