

Diarrheal Disease and Childhood Pneumonia in Cambodia

The vast majority of deaths from diarrhea occur in low-resource countries such as Cambodia, where families are at high risk for the disease as a result of living in poor sanitary conditions and not having access to safe water or to lifesaving treatment. Malnourished children are most at risk of dying due to severe diarrhea and a general lack of understanding among parents about the causes, symptoms, and treatment of diarrhea creates additional obstacles to reducing its incidence.

Similarly, children from poor families and those whose mothers are less educated are most at risk of childhood pneumonia. They often have less access to health services, may lack appropriate knowledge, and are more likely to be exposed to major risk factors such as household air pollution, crowded living conditions, and exposure to second-hand smoke. As with diarrheal disease, malnourishment significantly contributes to a child's susceptibility to pneumonia.

Since 2005, PATH has been working with local partners in Cambodia to increase knowledge and awareness within the health community of new interventions—such as zinc, low-osmolarity oral rehydration solution, and rotavirus vaccine—for the prevention and treatment of diarrheal disease. Recognizing that an



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integrated approach to address childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease is likely to prove both an effective and efficient use of resources, PATH, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, has recently begun to incorporate childhood pneumonia into the ongoing efforts to strengthen diarrheal disease prevention and control in Cambodia.

Strengthening the policy environment

PATH helped to facilitate the establishment of a technical working group within the Ministry of Health to focus on issues related to childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease and is providing ongoing technical support to national efforts to update and develop guidance documents such as a national policy, a zinc distribution plan, and a multiyear strategic plan. A stronger policy environment for these two health concerns will support the scale up of focused interventions, as well as strengthen the integration of pneumonia and diarrhea activities into the broader child survival context through strategies such as Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses.

Building strong partnerships, both within the Ministry of Health and between the Ministry of Health and key external stakeholders, is an important focus of efforts to more effectively address childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease in Cambodia. The project aims to foster a policy environment that is conducive

An integrated approach

Childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease are the two leading causes of preventable deaths among young children throughout the world, responsible for about 40 percent of all child deaths. However, focused attention on these issues has waned since the 1990s as cross-cutting approaches to child survival have become the more dominant approach. While the integration of diarrhea and pneumonia control into broader child survival initiatives is important, complementary efforts to expand access to new prevention and treatment interventions is also essential if programs are going to have a significant and sustained impact on childhood deaths.

As part of its enhanced diarrheal disease control initiative in Cambodia, Vietnam, and elsewhere, PATH has been working to overcome barriers to preventing and treating diarrheal disease and raise awareness about both new and proven interventions. In Cambodia, PATH is working with the Ministry of Health to integrate these initiatives with focused efforts to bring key childhood pneumonia prevention and treatment messages and tools to those who need them most.

to the development of long-term plans, making these partnerships essential to sustaining continued interest in reducing childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease throughout the country. PATH is providing ongoing mentorship to Ministry of Health partners to encourage and facilitate constructive engagement.

Demonstrating impact

The next step of the project involves working with the Ministry of Health to demonstrate the feasibility and impact of complementing existing child health programs with an additional and integrated package of activities to address childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease. Baray-Santuk Operational Health District in Kampong Thom Province has been identified as a suitable location for the demonstration activities.

PATH will focus on strengthening case management capabilities at public health facilities, improving information provision and referral services from the community to improve caretakers' health-seeking behaviors, and strengthening supervision. These activities will facilitate the implementation of best practices in childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease management at the health facilities and in the community as well as the dissemination of important prevention and homecare messages.

PATH's commitment

PATH is committed to continuing to build on the momentum of these integrated efforts to reduce the burden of childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease in Cambodia. PATH will identify opportunities to work with national partners to support complementary initiatives such as the introduction of rotavirus and pneumococcal vaccines; advancement of innovations and technology to improve case management; expansion of water, sanitation, and hygiene programs; reduction of household air pollution; and integration of maternal and childhood nutrition activities. Additionally, building on PATH's experience in Cambodia and Vietnam, efforts are currently under way to assess the applicability of this broad-based and integrated approach to addressing childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease in other countries of the Mekong region, such as Myanmar and Laos.

The response to the ongoing tragedy of childhood pneumonia and diarrheal disease must be a coordinated effort that is considered a high public health priority. As noted by a key United Nations Interagency Group, "Revitalizing efforts against pneumonia and diarrhoea, while bolstering nutrition, could save millions of children."



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Although there have been reductions in the number of deaths of young children in Cambodia, mortality of children under five remains significantly higher than in neighboring countries, with 88 per 1,000 dying before their fifth birthday. It is estimated that 32,000 children under five die each year in Cambodia, 9,000 as a result of pneumonia and 2,250 as a result of diarrhea. Many of these deaths could be avoided if access to proven prevention and management interventions were made routinely available to all Cambodian children.

Diarrheal disease and childhood pneumonia resources

PATH Defeat DD website. Available at: www.defeatdd.org

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO). Diarrhea: Why children are still dying and what can be done. New York: UNICEF; 2009.

UNICEF and WHO. Pneumonia: The forgotten killer of children. New York: UNICEF; 2006.

United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation. Levels & Trends in Child Mortality. New York: UNICEF; 2010.

WHO. Diarrhoeal disease [fact sheet]. Geneva: WHO; 2009.

WHO. Global action plan for the prevention and control of pneumonia (GAPP). Geneva: WHO; 2009.

WHO. Pneumonia [fact sheet]. Geneva: WHO; 2010.

PATH is an international nonprofit organization that creates sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, enabling communities worldwide to break longstanding cycles of poor health. By collaborating with diverse public- and private-sector partners, PATH helps provide appropriate health technologies and vital strategies that change the way people think and act. PATH's work improves global health and well-being.



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