

Sure Start

Every year, four million newborns die in the first month of life, 99 percent of them in developing countries. Yet three out of four of these newborn deaths could be prevented with relatively simple, evidence-based interventions delivered at home—such as antibiotics for pneumonia, sterile blades to cut umbilical cords, and skin-to-skin contact to keep babies warm.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is providing critical support for advancing these solutions in the developing world. The Foundation recently provided a landmark grant to PATH to implement key initiatives that support home-based newborn and maternal health in India.

Supporting grassroots initiatives

PATH's "Sure Start" project will reduce newborn and maternal morbidity and mortality in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The project's primary objectives are to:

- Support and increase individual, household, and community action that can directly save newborn lives and reduce maternal morbidity and mortality.
- Strengthen community engagement with India's changing health systems.

PATH will achieve these objectives by developing, demonstrating, and refining a model of channeling technical and financial resources to the community level.

Working with approximately 20 consortia of nongovernmental organizations and other institutions, PATH and our partners will implement district-wide community support programs designed to reduce newborn and maternal disease and death. PATH will document and facilitate learning between districts and states, as well as with national policymakers.

Activities

Specific activities include:

- Increasing access to and coverage of skilled attendance at birth.
- Building networks of community health workers to assist birth attendants and visit mothers in the first few days after birth. These networks will support mothers to keep themselves and their newborns healthy and provide additional home-based treatment and care when needed. (Workers will also be trained to recognize conditions that require care at a clinic or hospital and to facilitate referrals.)
- Developing community savings programs, such as group insurance or income pools, to help cover the cost of newborn and maternal complications and referrals.
- Developing links among communities so they can share lessons learned and advocate for greater attention to newborn health.

These activities will help households and communities employ simple, effective health measures to ensure safe childbirth, protect newborns and mothers at home, and expand access to maternal and newborn health services.

Expected outcomes

PATH estimates that the initiative will reach approximately 600,000 newborns and 600,000 mothers over the next five years, enabling community action on essential newborn and maternal health issues. It will also help demonstrate how to improve newborn and maternal survival, even in the poorest communities.

Key facts

Duration: November 2005 to November 2010

Funding: \$24.3 million

Program leads: Jeff O'Malley, Country Director, India; Deepti Chirmulay, Program Coordinator