



world pneumonia day

Fight Pneumonia. Save a Child. **November 2nd.**

October 23, 2009

Dear Public Health Leader:

Every 15 seconds, pneumonia claims the life of another child. By this time tomorrow, it will kill another 5,500 children, and in one year, a staggering 2 million children.¹ Despite this deadly toll, pneumonia remains a neglected disease. More than ever before, we know how to protect and prevent children from contracting pneumonia, and how to treat those suffering from it. Yet, we are failing to deliver life-saving interventions to millions of children, especially in developing countries. We are asking you and other leaders in public health and medicine to join in the fight against pneumonia. Your voice will be an important part of our efforts to convince policymakers, the media and members of the public that now is the time to take action to stop childhood pneumonia. Join us in acknowledging:

- **Pneumonia is the leading infectious cause of death in children**
Pneumonia kills more than 2 million children under five per year¹, making it the disease that is responsible for the largest number of under-five deaths worldwide.² The burden of disease is particularly great in developing countries, where more than 2000 children will die of pneumonia for every child that dies of pneumonia in a developed country.³
- **Reducing the burden of pneumonia is essential for achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4**
MDG 4 calls for a two-thirds reduction of the under-five child mortality rate by 2015.⁴ While progress has been made, this rate remains unacceptably high.⁴ We must take immediate action towards prevention, protection, and treatment of pneumonia in order to achieve MDG 4.
- **Preventing pneumonia before it occurs is key**
Hib and pneumococcal bacteria are estimated to cause more than 50% of life-threatening pneumonia in children under five.⁵ While great progress has been made in expanding access to the Hib vaccine, most children in developing countries don't yet have access to the pneumococcal conjugate vaccines used throughout most of the developed world.
- **Protecting children from pneumonia is possible**
Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life can protect children from pneumonia.⁶ Other low-cost measures, including improving nutrition⁷, reducing low birth weight⁸, reducing indoor air pollution⁹, and hand washing¹⁰, also help protect children from this deadly disease.
- **Treatment for pneumonia works, and it is affordable**
Antibiotics, which cost less than a dollar per day, can effectively treat pneumonia.¹¹ Yet, only an estimated one in five children with pneumonia receives life-saving antibiotics.¹²

We ask you to take action today to fight childhood pneumonia by joining the Global Coalition Against Pneumonia at www.WorldPneumoniaDay.org. Your support, and the support of the institution you lead, will make the Coalition a stronger and more powerful voice on behalf of children around the world. The first-annual World Pneumonia Day is November 2, 2009. We also ask for your support on that day and beyond as we call on the world to acknowledge that the lives of 2 million children can be saved every year by protection, prevention, and treatment of pneumonia. Together, we can combat this deadly disease and save the lives of millions of children.

Sincerely yours,

Michael J. Klag, MD, MPH
Dean, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Citation

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- ³World Health Organization. World health statistics 2006. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2006. <http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat2006.pdf>. Accessed September 6, 2009.
- ⁴Millennium Development Goal: Fact sheet for Goal 4. New York: United Nations; 2008. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2008highlevel/pdf/newsroom/Goal%204%20FINAL.pdf>
- ⁵Based on settings where Hib and pneumococcal vaccines are not routinely used. O'Brien KL, Wolfson LJ, Watt JP, Henkle E, Deloria-Knoll M, McCall N, Lee E, Mulholland K, Levine O, Cherian T, for the Hib and Pneumococcal Global Burden of Disease Study Team. Burden of Disease caused by *Streptococcus Pneumoniae* in children younger than 5 years: global estimates. *Lancet*. 2009;374:893-902.
- ⁶Roth DE, Caulfield LE, Ezzati M, Black RE. Acute lower respiratory tract infections in childhood: opportunities for reducing the global burden through nutritional interventions. *Bull World Health Organ* 2008; 86: 356-64.
- ⁷Fishman SM, Caulfield LE, de Onis M, Blossner M, Hyder AA, Mullany L, et al. Childhood and maternal underweight. In: Ezzati M, Lopez AD, Rodgers A, Murray CJL, eds. *Comparative quantification of health risks: global and regional burden of disease attributable to selected major risk factors*. Geneva: WHO; 2004. pp. 39-161.
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- ⁹Smith KR, Sarnet JM, Romieu I, Bruce N. Indoor air pollution in developing countries and acute lower respiratory infections in children. *Thorax*. 2000;55:518-32.
- ¹⁰Luby SP, Agboatwalla M, Freikin DR, Painter J, Billhimer W, Altaf A, Hoekstra RM. Effect of handwashing on child health: a randomised controlled trial. *Lancet*. 2005; 366:225-233.
- ¹¹Sazawal S, Black RE, Pneumonia Case Management Trials Group. Effect of pneumonia case management on mortality in neonates, infants, and pre-school children: a meta-analysis of community based trials. *Lancet Infect Dis*. 2003;3:547-56.
- ¹²Figure based on multiple Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), cited in: Wardlaw T, Johansson EW, Hodge M. Pneumonia: the forgotten killer of children. New York: UNICEF, The World Bank; 2006.