

Act now to prevent maternal and child deaths

In 1990, [nearly 1 in 10 children died before their fifth birthday](#), mostly in impoverished countries. In the face of this overlooked crisis, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched a child survival revolution. Over the next thirty years, the world came together to significantly reduce maternal and child mortality.

We made incredible gains through targeted interventions, but progress has begun to stall. In 2020, [5 million children](#) died under the age of five—that's 13,800 children every single day. Preventable causes like malnutrition, pneumonia, and diarrhea account for most of these needless deaths, and death tolls are continuing to rise in the wake of COVID-19, climate change, and global conflict. The compounding crises are especially dangerous for women and girls, nearly [300,000](#) of whom died due to lack of basic healthcare for pregnancy and birth.

Understanding maternal and child nutrition

Nutrition is a fundamental building block of health that must be accessible to everyone. The problem of global malnutrition goes far beyond lack of food. [According to the United Nations, we already produce enough food](#) to feed everyone in the world—and then some. But we need to make sure that people have physical and economic access to the right types of food and micronutrients at the right time.

Malnourishment and stunting are part of a vicious cycle. When we interrupt it, the positive effects ripple out for generations.

[New research published in the Lancet](#) has found that over half of preschool-aged children and two-thirds of non-pregnant women of reproductive age worldwide have micronutrient deficiencies. This means that millions of people are not able to access a nutritious diet at the times in their life where good nutrition matters the most.

When people do not have access to the proper calories and micronutrients to fuel their growing brains and bodies, it can lead to lifelong disability and death.

- **Stunting is when children don't grow well over time.** It's often identified by height—when children are too short for their age—and is the result of chronic and prolonged malnutrition. 22 percent of all children globally are stunted.
- **Wasting is when a child is too thin for their height.** Wasting is often a sign of acute malnutrition from recent and severe weight loss, usually from a combination of a low-quality diet and illness. Children who are wasted have a [much higher risk of death](#) than well-nourished children

Vaccines are a gamechanger to save children's lives, especially in impoverished communities

Vaccines are responsible for reducing the spread of infectious diseases and saving millions of lives. Immunization can prevent diseases such as pneumonia, measles, whooping cough, and deadly diarrhea caused by rotavirus. It costs \$18 per child to fully immunize children in low-income countries, reduced from \$24 in 2013.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is an innovative partnership that works to ensure that children living in impoverished countries do not miss out of lifesaving vaccines. As part of this mission, [Gavi has helped vaccinate](#) more than 981 million children in the most impoverished countries, preventing millions of future deaths. Thanks to innovative financial instruments rolled out by Gavi the price of pneumonia vaccines has [decreased 43 percent](#) since 2009—from \$3.50 per dose to \$2.00 per dose.

Because of health service interruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, **global vaccination coverage has suffered the largest backslide in 30 years**. This is happening against a backdrop of rapidly rising malnutrition which is creating a perfect storm for child health. Malnourished children already have weakened immunity, so missing out on vaccines or falling behind schedule means common childhood illnesses could become deadly.

We must increase resources for maternal and child health

U.S. investments in maternal and child health and nutrition are some of the most cost-effective and are among the highest impact interventions our foreign aid dollars can buy. [Every \\$1 invested](#) in maternal and child nutrition programs returns \$16 to the local economy.

With U.S. Congressional support, we can prevent millions of deaths of mothers and children and improve the equity and impact of our global health programs.

Will you support increasing funding for the Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition programs at USAID in fiscal year 2024?