

3. Child Mortality REPORT

The United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNIGME) Report 2025 was released recently

1.Introduction

1. Child mortality remains a critical indicator of a country's health system performance, reflecting access to healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, and socio-economic conditions.
2. Despite substantial global progress since 1990, recent trends indicate a slowdown in the reduction of child deaths, particularly in vulnerable regions.
3. India has shown notable improvements, yet challenges persist in ensuring equitable and sustainable child survival outcomes.

2.Major Highlights of Global Child Mortality Trends

Magnitude and Nature of Child Mortality

1. An estimated 4.9 million children died before the age of five in 2024, including 2.3 million newborn deaths, highlighting the persistence of preventable mortality.
2. Neonatal deaths account for nearly half of all under-five deaths, indicating that the most critical window of vulnerability is around birth and the first month of life.
3. A significant proportion of these deaths are preventable through low-cost interventions such as skilled birth attendance, immunisation, breastfeeding, and basic healthcare access.

Causes of Mortality Across Age Groups

1. Among newborns, the leading causes of death include prematurity, complications during labour and delivery, and neonatal infections such as sepsis.
2. Among children aged 1–59 months, infectious diseases such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, and malaria remain major causes of death, often exacerbated by underlying malnutrition.
3. For the first time, global estimates highlight that severe acute malnutrition directly caused more than 100,000 child deaths in 2024, underlining the lethal synergy between nutrition deficits and disease.

3.Progress and Emerging Concerns

Long-term Gains in Child Survival

1. Since 1990, the global under-five mortality rate has declined by approximately 60 percent, while neonatal mortality has fallen by around 45 percent.
2. This progress reflects improvements in vaccination, maternal healthcare, sanitation, and disease control interventions.

Recent Slowdown in Progress

1. Since 2015, the pace of reduction in child mortality has slowed significantly by more than 60 percent, indicating stagnation in global efforts.
2. At the current rate, an estimated 27.3 million children under five are projected to die between 2025 and 2030.
3. This slowdown is linked to health system weaknesses, inequality, conflicts, and disruptions such as pandemics.

Regional Concentration of Mortality

1. Child deaths remain disproportionately concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.
2. These regions face compounded challenges including poverty, malnutrition, weak health infrastructure, and conflict situations.
3. This highlights the need for geographically targeted interventions.

4.India-Specific Trends and Achievements

Significant Reduction in Mortality Indicators

1. India has demonstrated consistent progress in reducing child mortality through sustained public health interventions.
2. Neonatal Mortality Rate declined from 57 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 17 in 2024, indicating improvements in maternal and neonatal care.
3. Under-five Mortality Rate reduced from 127 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 27 in 2024, reflecting large-scale gains in child health outcomes.

Drivers of Improvement

1. Expansion of institutional deliveries has reduced risks associated with childbirth.
2. Strengthening of immunisation programmes has significantly reduced vaccine-preventable diseases.
3. Improved access to maternal healthcare and nutrition services has enhanced survival rates.

5. Government Initiatives to Reduce Child Mortality in India

Maternal and Neonatal Healthcare Interventions

1. Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram ensures free and cashless delivery services, including cesarean sections, along with free drugs, diagnostics, transport, and blood transfusion.
2. Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan provides assured, quality antenatal care on a fixed monthly day to detect and manage high-risk pregnancies.
3. Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Days facilitate last-mile delivery of maternal and child healthcare services and awareness.

Digital Tracking and Awareness Mechanisms

1. The Reproductive and Child Health portal enables real-time tracking of pregnant women and newborns to ensure continuity of care.
2. Mother and Child Protection Cards educate families about nutrition, healthcare practices, and danger signs during pregnancy.

Immunisation and Child Health Programmes

1. Mission Indradhanush aims to achieve universal immunisation coverage by targeting underserved populations and strengthening routine immunisation.
2. Full immunisation coverage has significantly increased, demonstrating improved outreach and service delivery.
3. Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram focuses on early detection and management of diseases, deficiencies, developmental delays, and birth defects among children.

Nutrition-Focused Interventions

1. Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres provide specialised care for children suffering from severe acute malnutrition with medical complications.
2. These centres play a crucial role in reducing mortality linked to malnutrition.

Institutional Framework: UNIGME

1. The United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation was established in 2004 to improve data quality, estimation methods, and monitoring of child mortality trends.
2. It is led by UNICEF and includes WHO, the World Bank Group, and the UN Population Division as core members.
3. It provides globally harmonised and reliable estimates that guide policy interventions and international cooperation.

6. Key Challenges

Persistent Inequality in Access to Healthcare

1. Marginalised populations continue to face barriers in accessing quality healthcare services.
2. Rural-urban disparities and socio-economic inequalities remain significant.

Burden of Malnutrition

1. Malnutrition continues to be a major underlying cause of child mortality in India and globally.
2. It weakens immunity and increases susceptibility to infections.

Health System Constraints

1. Shortage of skilled healthcare personnel and infrastructure gaps affect service delivery.
2. Quality of care remains inconsistent across regions.

Impact of Emerging Risks

1. Climate change, pandemics, and conflicts are increasingly affecting child health outcomes.
2. These factors disrupt healthcare services and worsen vulnerabilities.

7.Way Forward

Strengthening Primary Healthcare Systems

1. Investment in primary healthcare is essential for early diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of childhood diseases.
2. Universal access to affordable and quality healthcare must be ensured.

Targeted Interventions for High-Risk Groups

1. Focus must be placed on mothers and children in high-burden regions and fragile settings.
2. Tailored strategies are required to address region-specific challenges.

Enhancing Accountability and Governance

1. Strong monitoring mechanisms are needed to ensure effective implementation of health programmes.
2. Greater coordination between central and state governments can improve outcomes.

Addressing Malnutrition Holistically

1. Integrated approaches combining healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, and social protection are required.
2. Focus on early childhood nutrition can significantly reduce mortality.

Do You Know

1. India has successfully eradicated diseases such as smallpox, polio, and maternal and neonatal tetanus through sustained immunisation efforts.
2. The Universal Immunisation Programme is one of the largest in the world, covering millions of pregnant women and newborns annually.
3. Recent initiatives such as HPV and indigenous Td vaccines further strengthen India's preventive healthcare framework.

Conclusion

1. While significant progress has been made in reducing child mortality, the slowdown in recent years highlights the need for renewed policy focus and investment.
2. India's experience demonstrates that targeted interventions, strong political commitment, and robust public health systems can yield substantial gains.
3. Achieving SDG targets will require a comprehensive, equity-focused approach that prioritises the most vulnerable populations and strengthens health systems at all levels.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/india-sustains-progress-in-reducing-child-deaths-amid-slowng-global-gains-says-new-un-report/article70757618.ece>