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Experts: Diarrhea Neglect Killing Millions of Children

May 14, 2009

[Martha Dodge, OneWorld US](#)

WASHINGTON, May 14 (OneWorld.net) - Health experts are calling on the United States and other world powers to do more to prevent diarrheal disease, an easily preventable ailment that is one of the leading killers of children, and a growing global concern.

Diarrheal disease is both treatable and preventable, but "children are not receiving the simple and effective interventions they need," said health policy institute PATH in its new report "Diarrheal Disease: Solutions to Defeat a Global Killer."

Diarrheal disease kills some 5,000 children daily, and in some developing countries the severity of the disease is increasing, warn PATH and WaterAid, another humanitarian organization that published a separate report on the disease this week. "There are more lifesaving prevention and treatment solutions for diarrheal disease than any other major childhood killer," the groups noted in a joint statement.

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Speaking here Tuesday, PATH and WaterAid officials emphasized the need for wealthier countries to support treatment and prevention measures in areas where the disease is most acute. The groups joined a diverse coalition of over 75 organizations in a "Call to Action," urging increased financial support, new research, and redoubling of the commitment to the UN Millennium Development Goal of reducing child mortality by two-thirds by 2015.

Clean water and sanitation facilities could help prevent the deaths of millions of children from diarrheal diseases, which kill by severely dehydrating or causing dysentery. Good hygiene, breastfeeding, better nutrition, vaccines, and treatments with zinc and rehydration solutions are also key to saving lives, the groups said.

Success, Then Neglect

During the 1980s and 1990s the mortality rate of children dying of diarrheal diseases decreased by approximately 50 percent worldwide, thanks to effective treatments such as oral rehydration therapy (ORT). At the time diarrheal disease was considered a global priority.

"But over the last decade, momentum has slowed, with declines in research and funding commitments and competing global health priorities," noted the PATH report. Dr. John Wecker, a vaccine specialist at PATH, said the focus shifted because some believed the issue had essentially been solved, thanks to the reduction in mortality, so "the top killer of children ended up at the end of the agenda."

As financial support waned, Wecker explained, programs disappeared and, in Kenya, for example, many people could no longer access ORT treatments at the community level.

"While diarrheal disease is a global killer, today the burden is greatest in developing nations in Africa and Asia where access to clean water, sanitation, and urgent medical care may be limited," added Nancy Bwalya-Mukumbuta of WaterAid Zambia.

While previous efforts have focused solely on the treatment of diarrheal disease, PATH and WaterAid are suggesting a new approach that would not only support the implementation of health solutions such as ORT, zinc, the rotavirus vaccine, and breastfeeding education, but also allocate resources to projects that prevent diarrheal disease, such as building clean water supplies and simple sanitation latrines.

Prevention and treatment go hand in hand, said Bwalya-Mukumbuta, noting that the ORT powder used to treat the disease must be mixed in the clean, safe water that helps prevent it from occurring in the first place.

Andrew Barrer, executive director of the U.S. Coalition for Child Survival, agreed that a more comprehensive approach will be needed to undercut the disease worldwide, urging impacted countries to implement a "package of interventions." Barrer and others said that officials from all levels of government must work together with donors, local health officials, and communities to defeat the disease.

Funding Is Critical

Many experts have raised concerns about the severe lack of international funding to combat diarrheal disease.

"The aid system is not responding to the causes of child mortality in a targeted or proportionate manner," charged WaterAid in its report, "Fatal Neglect: How the Health Systems are Failing to Comprehensively Address Child Mortality."

The report shows that diarrheal diseases receive disproportionately less international funding than HIV/AIDS and malaria, even though diarrhea kills many more children.

"Funding should reflect the needs to combat the disease," said Bwalya-Mukumbuta, joining her colleagues at PATH in encouraging donors to support a multi-faceted strategy to not only allocate health treatments but also support water, sanitation, environmental, and education solutions.

The solutions are known and achievable, only the money and attention are missing, added Wecker, PATH's vaccine specialist. "The global health community knows what is necessary to save the lives of children suffering from diarrheal disease. And now is the time to educate policymakers, donors, and international and national leaders about the need to implement the solutions to prevent and treat the most severe causes."

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Contributing?

May 25, 2009 - 6:29am — jvdeen

Is there any way to contribute towards this specific cause? Are there any organizations that you can donate to for eliminating this problem in Africa?

Jack

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Contributing

May 28, 2009 - 10:21am — iwahlstrom

Jack,

Thank you for your comment and your interest in OneWorld. If you want to contribute, the two organizations mentioned in this article, PATH and WaterAid, are good resources. [PATH](#) is an international organization working on global health issues, and [WaterAid](#) is an NGO dedicated specifically to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene education for the world's poor.

Additionally, here are some of OneWorld.net's partner organizations that work on issues related to diarrheal disease and children's health:

Hesperian

Hesperian promotes the health of poor people around the world by making health information accessible. They produce books and other educational resources for community-based health care.

International Youth Foundation

IYF is an independent, nongovernmental organization dedicated to improving the conditions and prospects for young people worldwide and empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens.

JSI Research and Training Institute

JSI Research & Training Institute Inc., is a public health research and consulting firm that is dedicated to improving the health of individuals and communities throughout the world.

For more organizations and information, our [Children](#) and [Global Health](#) issue pages are a great resource. You should take a look at a variety of organizations to determine where you think a donation would make the biggest difference.

Another resource if you would like to donate to a specific cause is [GlobalGiving](#). This organization is an internet-based marketplace that directly connects donors interested in making a difference with high impact grass-roots development projects around the world.

We always love to hear from our readers, and welcome any future comments or questions.

Thank you,
OneWorld.net's Editors

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Too bad

May 25, 2009 - 12:41am — nuevo1

It's so sad that these kids have to experience this kind of situation. I mean, life is a gift and people did not exist to experience this kind of suffering. We also exist because we have the capacity to help others in need. So let's not allow this to happen any further and do our part.

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Those Poor Kids!

May 22, 2009 - 2:29am — bjdamore

It's so horrible to think of how easy it could be to prevent such terrible suffering in children and infants with simple things that are just not plentiful in some countries - clean drinking water, some simple medical attention, and clean sanitation.

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OMG

May 20, 2009 - 10:32pm — mekap04

Something as little as good hygiene and clean water can relate to a disease that kills lots of children. I really hope this will be taken care of seriously. I'm sure bringing the issues up and raising funds will help a lot.

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Yikes!

May 20, 2009 - 6:08pm — sammyanderson2009

Wow, I really hope that we can get in there and help them. Diarrhea is such a horrible condition. It completely dehydrates you so fast. [sammyanderson2009's picture](#)

- Sammy, Adult Acne Dermatologist

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not recognise the error of its ways. It always takes a major catastrophe for anyone to do anything, by which time it's too late. But hopefully with this new age that we're coming into, things will change.

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It is a sad reflection of

May 17, 2009 - 11:29am — lizzyhatpail

It is a sad reflection of the state of disease funding programs across the world that the diseases that get the majority of funding from the western world are not those diseases that are necessarily the biggest killers, rather those that represent the biggest threat to the populations of that western world.

HIV/Aids is a disease that anyone in the west can catch and die from. Diarrheal diseases are very unlikely to cause significant fatalities in the west. So guess which one gets disproportionate funding?

Lizzy

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Payday Loan

May 16, 2009 - 6:49am — Demarcus_Ss

Every nation's priority is the health of persons living in it. This proposal might not eliminate the need for more sweeping changes in the healthcare but it would be a start helping those who cannot afford to visit the doctor on regular basis. Nevertheless, a payday Loan can help. A payday loan is a great help when we are in a financial urgency. Let say you had a sudden expense with your healthcare, but your payday is still away. That is where they come in handy, and if you pay it back on payday, it won't build interest like a credit card. Come to think of it, there is nothing horrible about a payday loan. A payday loan is a small loan that you pay back quickly, usually the next payday. Usually \$15 to \$30 per \$100 loaned is paid for fee for the financing.

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Nice article

May 15, 2009 - 5:50pm — John Travista

I am very much convinced to everything you said and I agree that there are many ways to prevent yourself from diarrhea and it is surely treatable but if you just stay away from few things mentioned above then you can prevent yourself and your family from diarrhea.

Regards

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Experts: Diarrhea Neglect Killing Millions of Children

May 15, 2009 - 11:58am — jackie861

It is evident that as we read the headlines about so many children dying from diarrhea how much we take for granted. The "Call To Action" to support new research to reduce child mortality rates is sorely needed in countries such as these.

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It wont take much

May 14, 2009 - 2:15pm — discountwatchland

One would tend to believe that a condition that was solved and prevented killing in this country generations ago would prompt us to lend a hand to those not privileged to have our technology in solving this problem. I'm appalled that this is allowed to kill anyone, let alone innocent children.

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