



Helping children survive and thrive: safeguarding the health of children and women

ISSUE

The number of deaths among infants and under-fives has dropped significantly in the last decade. This can be attributed to high immunization rates of at least 80 per cent in the late 1990s. However, this coverage has not been sustained. Owing largely to the lack of vaccine supplies, the percentage of fully-immunized infant has fallen to 69 per cent in 2003. Unless more children are immunized against the six most common childhood illnesses – tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, and measles – children in the Philippines will continue to face the threat of preventable illness and death.

There is also a need to expand immunization to include hepatitis B. The estimated burden of this disease, which is linked to liver cancer, is one of the highest in Asia at about 9 per cent prevalence among the adult population. Vaccination coverage has ranged from a mere 2 to 40 per cent. Municipal cold chain equipment has been upgraded since the early 1980s. There is also a need to promote safety in injections. The use of auto-destruct (AD) syringes is not yet offered in routine immunizations.

As of 2002, 80 per cent of households in the Philippines have access to safe drinking water and 86 per cent have access to sanitary toilets. This translates to 7.4 million children without access to safe water for

drinking and over 5 million without sanitary facilities. Government-provided facilities are not maintained and often fall into disrepair. Most rural elementary schools do not have adequate supply of safe water and sanitary facilities.

Another area of concern is the persistently high rate of deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth. Over 11 women die in childbirth everyday. In the East Asia and Pacific region, the Philippines has the sixth highest number of deaths related to childbirth. An estimated 172 women for every 100,000 live births die due to pregnancy and childbirth. For every death, 40 more women suffer from pregnancy-related illnesses.

ACTION

Sustain and improve the Expanded Programme on Immunization. Improve outreach services in high-risk areas through regular mop-up/supplemental immunization using door-to-door strategy. Improve data quality, and build the capacity of health workers on EPI tools. The programme will also support hepatitis B immunization. Cold chain equipment will be upgraded and monitored. Immunization safety will be ensured through training and the provision of AD syringes and safety collector boxes.

Improve safe water and sanitation coverage. Through supply assistance, advocacy, and hygiene education, the programme will improve access to safe water and sanitation facilities. De-worming of preschool and school-age children will also be supported.

Enhance access to quality Emergency Obstetric Care services. The programme will help to make pregnancy and childbirth safer for women through the provision of facilities, training of health workers, and setting up of a system for emergency Obstetric Care to be available to more women. Women, their families and communities will also be educated about the danger signs of pregnancy, the importance of prenatal care, proper nutrition in pregnancy, and the need for skilled health personnel during delivery. Special attention will be given to safeguarding the health and nutrition of pre-pregnant women. The programme will address pre-conception nutritional needs, and diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and hookworm infestation. Information materials will be produced, and counselling will be provided to ensure that women are well-nourished, healthy, and well-informed before pregnancy.

IMPACT

With sustained high coverage of immunization for at least 95 per cent of children in the Philippines, infant and under-five mortality rates will be reduced. The country's polio-free status will be maintained. There will be fewer cases of measles, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, and hepatitis B. The programme addresses the fourth Millennium Development Goal which aims for a two-thirds reduction of under-five mortality rates between 1990 and 2015.

The programme reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by year 2015. At least 75 per cent of school-age children will receive regular deworming treatment by 2010. Improved personal hygiene will interrupt the transmission of diseases, and will reduce the incidence of diarrhoea among under-five children by as much as 48 per cent.

Within three years it is possible to reduce maternal mortality by 30 per cent to around 120 per 100,000 live births by focusing on the un-reached and improved handling of emergency obstetric cases.

The programme contributes to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of reducing maternal mortality to 52.5 per 100,000 live births by 2015.

The improvement of the health and nutritional status of pre-pregnant, pregnant, and lactating women will contribute to a reduction in low birth weight, stunting, maternal anemia, and maternal deaths.

ESTIMATED BUDGET (US\$)

Item/Description	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
1. Expanded Programme on Immunization	240,000	210,000	195,000	185,000	175,000	-	1,005,000
2. Hepatitis B vaccination	81,000	20,000	18,000	10,000	68,000	-	197,000
3. Cold chain upgrading	100,000	80,000	75,000	70,000	70,000	-	395,000
4. Safe injections	74,000	24,000	23,000	17,000	65,000	-	203,000
5. Safe water and sanitation	230,000	400,000	550,000	-	-	-	1,180,000
6. Emergency Obstetric (EmOC) services	-	555,000	780,000	720,000	655,000	470,000	3,180,000
7. Health & nutrition packages for adolescents	285,000	370,000	395,000	-	-	-	1,050,000
TOTALS	1,010,000	1,659,000	2,036,000	1,002,000	1,033,000	470,000	7,210,000