

Children & Nutrition: East Asia and the Pacific

| Trends in underweight prevalence in children under five | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1990 | 25% |
| Current available data | 15% (22 million children) |
| Average annual rate of reduction (AARR) | 3.6 (on track for MDG target) |
| Other key nutrition indicators | |
| Infants with low birthweight (%) | 7 |
| Children exclusively breastfed 0-6 months (%) | 43 |
| Children receiving vitamin A supplementation (%) | 73 (not including China) |
| Households consuming iodized salt (%) | 85 |
| Under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births) | 36 |



UNICEF/ HQ05-1690/Josh Estey. INDONESIA: Children in Aceh enjoy fortified biscuits from the World Food Programme WFP.

Challenges

Around 15% of children in the region are underweight, one of the lowest rates in the developing world, and the region has all but achieved the MDG target on nutrition, thanks to China. This country, whose 86 million children represent almost 60% of the children under five in the region, halved underweight prevalence from 19% in 1990 to just 8% in 2002. But remove China from the regional picture, and the region is no longer on track to reach the MDG target. There are major nutrition disparities, especially between rural and urban areas. More positively, the region (excluding China) has the highest rates of vitamin A supplementation for children in the developing world, reaching 73% of children aged six months to five years, and 85% of households are consuming iodized salt.

Priority countries

- Cambodia is the country least likely to reach the MDG nutrition target. Its proportion of underweight children grew from 40% in 1993 to 45% in 2000. The country also has the highest rate of child mortality in the region.
- Timor-Leste has the biggest proportion of underweight children region-wide at 46%.
- While there is little data from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, latest estimates suggest that 23% of its children are underweight. However, this is a major improvement over previous years.

Progress

- China's has launched an innovative mother and baby health package in the poorest areas and is progressing towards mandatory flour fortification while boosting access to iodized salt and vitamin and mineral supplements. These initiatives may further boost the country's decrease in underweight prevalence.
- Malaysia has made the fastest improvements, cutting underweight prevalence from 25% in 1990 to 11% in 2003 and is on track to meet the MDG target, alongside Indonesia, Singapore and Viet Nam. Progress is also being made in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and the Philippines.

UNICEF in action

- UNICEF's regional strategy on child undernutrition aims to improve maternal health and nutrition before pregnancy to ensure optimal foetal growth and the best start to life. Key indicators are thus maternal anaemia (as a general indicator for maternal well-being), low birthweight prevalence and child stunting. The strategy has four pillars: reaching adolescent girls and pre-pregnant and pregnant women with information, services and supplies; increasing the nutrition content of preventive and curative health care; developing community processes to empower girls and women; and expanding the reach of effective child nutrition interventions.
- In three of Viet Nam's most disadvantaged provinces, pre-pregnant women have access to a weekly dose of micronutrients at health centres as part of a UNICEF-supported initiative. Pregnant women have a daily dose and young couples receive a 'healthy wedding gift' of information and supplies on their wedding day to improve the health and nutrition of the woman.
- On Sumba Island, Indonesia, girls aged 15-19 who are out of school get a package of health and nutrition services to treat micronutrient deficiencies. In addition to micronutrients, the girls receive nutrition counselling and attend cooking classes.