

The main proximate causes of child deaths

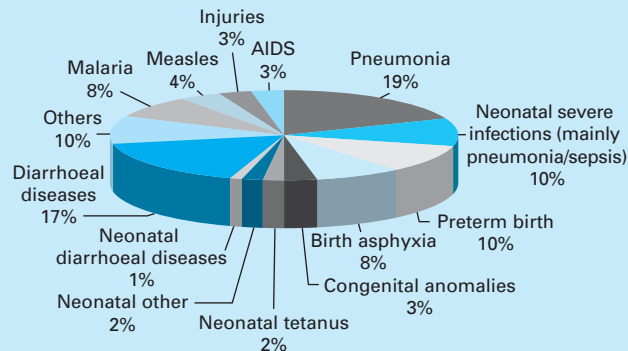
The countries and regions in which children under five are dying in large numbers are well known, and the main proximate causes of premature deaths and ill health are also well established.

Almost 40 per cent of all under-five deaths occur during the neonatal period, the first month of life, from a variety of complications (*see Panel, page 4*). Of these neonatal deaths, around 26 per cent – accounting for 10 per cent of all under-five deaths – are caused by severe infections. A significant proportion of these infections is caused by pneumonia and sepsis (a serious blood-borne bacterial infection that is also treated with antibiotics). Around 2 million children under five die from pneumonia each year – around 1 in 5 deaths globally. In addition, up to 1 million more infants die from severe infections including pneumonia, during the neonatal period. Despite progress since the 1980s, diarrhoeal diseases account for 17 per cent of under-five deaths. Malaria, measles and AIDS, taken together, are responsible for 15 per cent of child deaths.

Many conditions and diseases interact to increase child mortality beyond their individual impacts, with undernutrition contributing up to 50 per cent of child deaths. Unsafe water, poor hygiene practices and inadequate sanitation are not

Figure 1.8 Global distribution of cause-specific mortality among children under five

Undernutrition is implicated in up to 50 per cent of all deaths of children under five.



Source: World Health Organization and UNICEF.

only the causes of the continued high incidence of diarrhoeal diseases, they are a significant contributing factor in under-five mortality caused by pneumonia, neonatal disorders and undernutrition.

See *References, page 104*.