

Newborns have a better start in life when they receive regular Antenatal care and delivery with a skilled birth attendant. © UNICEF/2019/Chute

Climate change and disasters lead to increased diseases such as dengue fever; and water and food-borne diseases from higher temperatures, including diarrhoea and typhoid fever. Other risks relate to injuries and deaths from extreme weather events, vaccine-preventable diseases and COVID-19. Many PICTs have low elevation, small population density and scarce resources. This exposes communities to water and food insecurity brought on by rising sea levels, increasing water and soil salinity, warming seas and changing rainfall patterns. Climate change is also likely to exacerbate different forms of malnutrition and risk factors for diet-related noncommunicable diseases.



During an emergency, it is vital that children keep up to date with lifesaving routine immunizations.
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UNICEF PACIFIC ISLANDS Health

Overview

The 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) have made significant progress across all Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) health targets. However differences exist between and within countries, particularly in rural areas, in poorer communities and the isolated outer islands. Only one quarter of people in lower and middle-income countries believe that their health systems work well, with poor quality care a greater barrier to health outcomes than access.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted routine service delivery and led to a decline in routine child vaccination coverage especially in FSM, Samoa, Solomon Islands, RMI and Vanuatu, putting children at risk of infectious diseases such as measles, rubella, tuberculosis, and polio.

Uneven progress in the Pacific is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for child and maternal health.



SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.



SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.



SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Maternal Mortality

Not achieved SDG target:



Source: UNICEF Data Warehouse

Child Mortality

Not achieved SDG target:



Source: IGME, MICS

Where we are now

More mothers and children in the Pacific are living healthier lives thanks to improved health services. However, progress is slower than the global average, and inequities still exist for women and children in many PICTs due to geographic, demographic, and other barriers that hinder access.

Too many children, including adolescents, are not having their rights met to a full life and to survive and develop healthily.

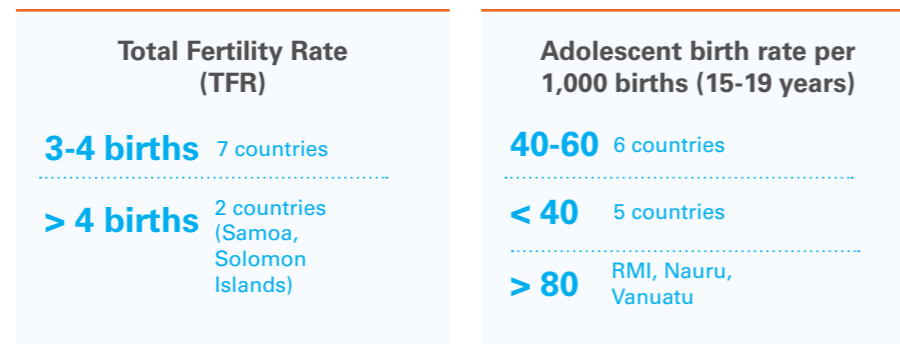


Babies born to mothers under 20 years old face higher risks of low birth weight, preterm delivery and severe neonatal conditions. They are also more likely to have lower educational achievements, higher economic stress and limited opportunities.

Pregnancy and Delivery

The good news is that across the PICTs, most mothers take advantage of skilled birth attendants (SBA) during pregnancy and delivery, and many have achieved universal access. Samoa, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands have between 86-89 per cent SBA rates, the rest of the PICTs have at least 90 per cent.

Most expectant women seek antenatal care in the PICTs at least once during pregnancy. However, additional visits are highly recommended to help women prepare for delivery and understand warning signs during pregnancy and childbirth. It can be a source of micronutrient supplementation, treatment of hypertension, immunization against tetanus, and HIV testing – all of which contribute to higher maternal and infant survival rates. The HIV burden is low with prevention of mother-to-child transmission and paediatric HIV care integrated into routine service delivery.



Source: UNICEF data warehouse

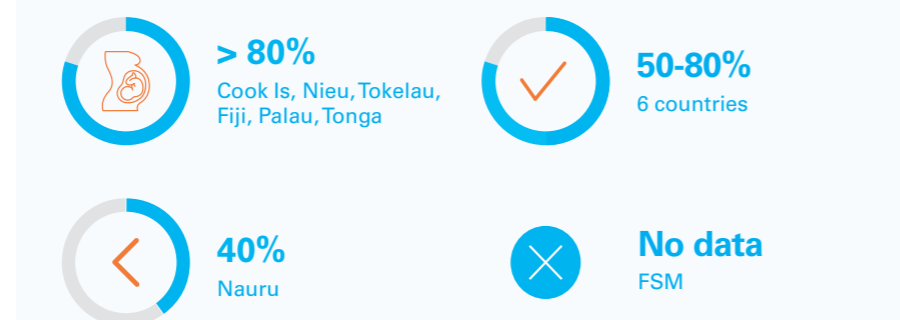
Source: SOWC, MICS

Skilled Birth Attendants (SBA) coverage



Source: SOWC

Antenatal Care (ANC) 4 visits



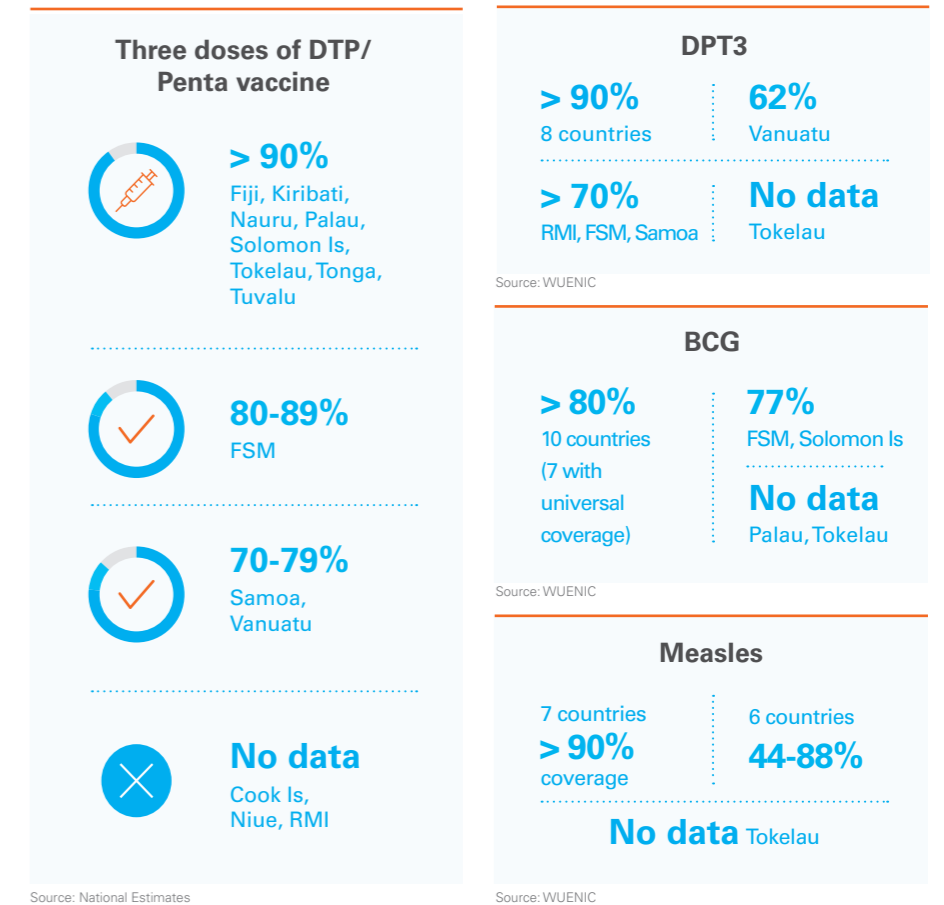
Source: SOWC 2021



Immunization is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions to date and has safely reduced the scourge of diseases like polio and measles, helping children grow up healthy and happy.

Immunization

PICTs tend to have high routine vaccination coverage for boys and girls, with some exceptions. New vaccines are also being introduced in the region. Of the 14 PICTs, only Vanuatu has not introduced the second measles dose. All PICTs with the exception of Kiribati, Tonga and Vanuatu have now introduced the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) to girls between 9-14 years of age. Plans are underway to introduce HPV in all 14 countries by mid 2023, reaching an estimated total of 57,213 girls throughout the PICTs. Rotavirus and Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) vaccines have also been introduced for boys and girls under two years of age.



Source: National Estimates

Source: WUENIC



Regular check-ups help ensure any health issue is caught early on. © UNICEF/2019/Natfain

Policies

Many PICTs have a range of policies and strategic plans, but these are often vertical programmes that are sometimes underfunded and difficult to operationalize, especially where multi-sectoral partnerships are required. Given the size of many PICTs, policy consolidation is needed, to ensure that high impact interventions are included in a well-articulated and adequately funded policy and roadmap.

Building on previous work, the new 2023-2027 Health Programme will primarily focus on providing technical and strategic support to strengthen health systems. This includes improving overall services for children, adolescents and women; empowering families

and communities; building capacity; and strengthening governance and accountability. The programme will use a life-cycle approach and will advocate for accelerated results by scaling up existing or new interventions with a greater emphasis on integration.

What is UNICEF doing?



Education and empowering parents to take charge of their child's health and nutrition are vital in reducing illness and childhood mortality.
© UNICEF/2006/Pirozzi

Most of the health issues faced by women and children in the Pacific are preventable, and this requires effective primary health care (PHC). PHC addresses the majority of a person's health needs throughout their lifetime. This includes physical, mental and social well-being and is people-centred rather than disease-centred. UNICEF's health systems strengthening approach envisages a more competent PHC system and quality service delivery.

Key Elements

- Engage in strategies that support national health security and build resilience, encompassing all sectors of health and nutrition and the impact of climate change and emergencies.
- Ensure social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- Support effective financing strategies.
- Strengthen legislative and regulatory frameworks and promote multisector and multisystem (food, health, water and sanitation, education, and social protection) engagement to improve food environments.
- Strengthen PHC performance through greater availability and using regular, reliable, and accurate information to assess gaps better, determine priorities, establish baselines and targets, and track progress and performance.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation and the development of a learning strategy to generate evidence relating to implementation and change pathways.
- Support revitalization of routine immunization services in the post-COVID context.
- Develop effective social and behaviour change approaches.

These key elements will shape how UNICEF approaches the Pacific's most urgent health and nutrition needs. Based on current evidence and data, UNICEF will work with governments and partners on two main areas to reduce:

- High levels of child mortality in four countries- Kiribati, Nauru, RMI, and Fiji.
- High burden of pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, and sepsis contributing to the unacceptable levels of child morbidity in at least four PICTs- Kiribati, Nauru, RMI, and Fiji.

Acronyms

Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.



Estimated budget for the Health programme 2023-2027:

US\$27 million



UNICEF supported the COVID-19 vaccine roll out, and that included travelling to remote islands, while making sure to maintain the cold chain.
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UNICEF Pacific Multi Country Office

Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

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