Respiratory illness

Children in low-income urban communities also suffer the effects of air pollution, including respiratory infections, asthma and lead poisoning. Every year, polluted indoor air is responsible for almost 2 million deaths, almost half due to pneumonia, among children under 5 years of age. Outdoor air pollution claims another 1.3 million child and adult lives per year. In Nairobi, Kenya, a 2005 study found that chronic exposure to pollutants in urban areas contributed to over 60 per cent of all cases of respiratory disease among children in these settings. Studies in the United States show that chronic exposure to high levels of air toxins occurs disproportionately in poor urban communities settled by people of minority races.

Road traffic injuries

Vehicular traffic also poses a physical threat to children – one heightened by a lack of safe play spaces and pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks and crossings. The World Health Organization estimates that road traffic injuries account for 1.3 million deaths annually – the leading single cause of death worldwide among people aged 15–29, and the second for those aged 5–14.

HIV and AIDS

Recent data suggest that new infections with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) among children are decreasing amid improvements in access to services preventing transmission of the virus from mother to child during pregnancy, labour, delivery or breastfeeding. About one fourth as many new cases of HIV infection among children are believed to have occurred in 2010 as in 2005. Despite this progress, about 1,000 babies a day were infected through mother-to-child transmission in 2010.

In addition, nearly 2,600 people aged 15–24 were infected every day in 2010. These infections were mainly the result of unprotected sex or unsafe injection practices. In 2010, some 2.2 million adolescents aged 10–19 were living with HIV worldwide, the majority of them unaware of their HIV status. During a critical period of transition out of childhood, many of these adolescents were left without access to appropriate information, treatment, care or support, including age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health care and prevention services.

Figure 2.4. HIV is more common in urban areas and more prevalent among females

HIV prevalence among young women and men aged 15–24 in urban and rural areas in selected sub-Saharan African countries

Countries were selected based on availability of data.