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Hunger and Malnutrition are International Health Issues

Hunger and malnutrition are prevalent worldwide. Currently 821 million people, or about 11% of the world’s population, suffer from chronic food deprivation.ⁱ Of these, an estimated 3.1 million children under the age of five die annually due to under-nutrition.ⁱⁱ In the first 1,000 days of a child’s life—from conception to the age of two—over 40 vitamins and minerals are required for healthy development.ⁱⁱⁱ The resilience of individuals, families, and communities therefore depends on adequate food intake and nutrition.

Malnutrition Around the World

- According to UNICEF, there are at least 16 million children in our world under the age of five suffering from severe acute malnutrition. These children are 9 times more likely to die than well-nourished children.^{iv}
- Stunting occurs in children who have access to food but for whom nutrition and hygiene are inadequate; 149 million children are stunted and will experience lifelong cognitive and physical deficits that cannot be overcome.^{v,vi}
- Malnutrition contributes to an estimated 45% of all child deaths as it makes a child more susceptible to other life-threatening diseases and illnesses.^{vii} Malnourished children are at higher risk of death from common childhood illnesses such as diarrhea, malaria, and pneumonia.^{viii}
- Micronutrient deficiencies affect 2 billion people on our planet; these deficiencies can lead to a variety of preventable health issues.^{ix}

Nutrition and Diseases of Poverty

- HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria—considered diseases of poverty—impact adults in the prime years of their lives by reducing or preventing them from working or producing food. In 2017, 2.2 million people died from complications due to HIV/AIDS and TB, with millions more infected and receiving treatment.^{x,xi}
- Diseases of poverty perpetuate a dangerous food insecurity and poverty cycle in families due to the lack of work, the sale of assets, and migration.^{xii}
- Adequate food intake is also a critical component for the effectiveness of lifesaving medications for the treatment of HIV/AIDS and TB.^{xiii}



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An Economic Problem

- There is a direct correlation between poverty and malnutrition in developing nations.^{xiv}
- According to the World Bank, childhood under-nutrition can cost a country 2-3% of their annual GDP.^{xv}
- The estimated impact of malnutrition on the global economy could be as high as US\$3.5 trillion per year, or US\$500 per individual.^{xvi}

Solutions

- Intervening early, during the first 1,000 days of life, with proper nutrition is vital to preventing irreversible health and economic damage.
- The 2008 Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Under-nutrition reported that breastfeeding counseling and fortification or supplementation with vitamin A and zinc have the greatest potential to reduce the burden of child morbidity and mortality.
- Improvements in complementary feeding through counselling and/or provision of food supplements for young children in food-insecure situations could substantially reduce stunting.^{xvii}
- Management of Severe Acute Malnutrition according to the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, with outpatient treatment of uncomplicated cases using ready-to-use therapeutic foods, has been shown effective in reducing mortality of young children.^{xviii}
- Maternal nutrition interventions, such as micronutrient supplementation and balanced energy and protein food supplements, can improve outcomes for maternal and child health.^{xix}
- To help eliminate preventable child deaths, UNICEF, WHO, and others are calling for the support of Maternal and Child Survival Programs that have programming for programming in maternal, newborn, and child health; immunization; family planning, fertility awareness and reproductive health; nutrition; health systems strengthening; water, sanitation, and hygiene; malaria; prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV; and pediatric HIV care and treatment.^{xx}
- School feeding programs encourage students, especially girls, to attend school and become educated—and help students stay focused while in school.^{xxi}
- Programs, like those supported by PEPFAR, Feed the Future, and the World Food Program, which improve medical treatment, help treat malnutrition, and improve access to food for families living with HIV/AIDS, TB, and malaria, are vital to improving health outcomes in communities affected by these diseases.

For additional information please contact the Alliance to End Hunger at info@alliancetoendhunger.org or visit our website at www.alliancetoendhunger.org

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