

FACT SHEET:

UNDERNUTRITION AND VITAMIN AND MINERAL DEFICIENCIES

Global¹ and Regional² Facts

Deaths of children under five in 2004 related to underweight: 5.6 million (53 per cent of the under five mortality total)

Percentage of children under five underweight in developing countries (1996-2005): 27 per cent (146 million).

Percentage of children under five in developing countries suffering from stunting (1996-2005): 31 per cent

Percentage of children under five in developing countries suffering from wasting (1996-2005): 10 per cent.

Babies born with low birth weight every year: more than 20 million

Percentage of low birth weight births per year in developing countries (1998-2005): 16 per cent.

Iron deficiency –the most widespread health problem in the modern world

Iron deficiency causes anaemia and is the most widespread micronutrient deficiency globally and in our region.

People worldwide suffering from iron deficiency anaemia: two billion.

Estimated number of deaths caused every year by severe iron deficiency and anaemia of women during child birth: 50,000.

More than one third of women of reproductive age in Cambodia, Myanmar and DPRK have anaemia. Similarly more than one third of children in Indonesia, Laos PDR, the Philippines, PNG and Viet Nam have anaemia, while in Cambodia and Myanmar, more than half of children under five are anemic.

Iodine Deficiency –the major cause of intellectual deficiency on the planet

Until recently, iodine deficiency was known as goitre and thought to affect only a minority. However more than 60 countries have iodine deficiency rates that are associated with a 10 percent to 15 percent lowering of average intellectual capacity.

Iodine deficiency, particularly in the first half of pregnancy, hampers brain and nervous system development and can result in reduced cognitive development and population IQ. Iodine deficiency in pregnancy is causing as many as 20 million babies a year to be born mentally impaired.

¹ DOC Global Fact Sheet April 2007

² Taken from UNICEF EAPRO website and Ministerial Consultation Fact sheet

Percentage of newborns in the developing world unprotected from the lifelong consequences of brain damage associated with IDD: 37 million

Percentage of households in developing countries using iodized salt in (1998 – 2005): 71 per cent

Percentage of newborns protected against IDD in 2004: 82 million

East Asia and Pacific region has achieved high rates of household coverage of iodized salt and two countries, China and Viet Nam have coverage over 90%. However, coverage remains low in DPRK, Thailand and Malaysia.

Vitamin A Deficiency- Responsible for a million child deaths a year

Vitamin A deficiency is believed to be pervasive in our region. Until recently, lack of vitamin A was seen as a nutritional problem causing blindness in severe cases. Now it is recognized as one of the most common and devastating of all health problems. By compromising immune systems it leaves children at risk of disease. An estimated one million children younger than 5 die because of lack of vitamin A to protect them from disease and infection.

Studies show that improving vitamin A levels in children in vitamin A deplete communities reduces overall under 5 mortality rates by 23 per cent. Children still at risk of vitamin A deficiency: 100-140 million

Percentage of children receiving vitamin A supplementation in developing countries in 2004: 68 per cent.

Cost of a vitamin A capsule: US \$ 0.02 cents

Folic Acid Deficiency

Folic acid helps cell division and tissue growth.

Neural Tube defects – including spina bifida- form in the first four weeks of pregnancy. If a woman is deficient in folic acid during these early stages of pregnancy, bone, skin many not form correctly.

Without additional folic acid, around two in every 1000 pregnancies globally will result in children with these disabilities. More than 70 per cent of these cases are avoidable with the mandatory folic acid fortification of flour.

Recent research indicates that fortifying flour with folic acid may significantly reduce heart disease and strokes in adults and is associated with roughly 1 in 10 adult deaths from heart disease.