

Health

What is health?

According to the World Health Organisation, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity". This means that many factors influence how healthy a person is.

Why is health a big issue in developing countries?

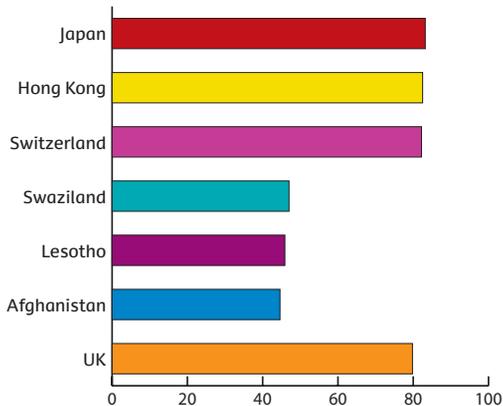


Health is one of the keys to development. To be healthy you need access to the right food, water, sanitation, education and shelter. You need access to health care that is effective at *preventing* health problems, as well as curing them. Millions of people living in poverty have little access to most or all of these. They get sick more often and die younger than people with more money. Health problems trap families and communities in poverty, because children cannot go to school and adults cannot work when ill.

Health differences

Health has an impact on how long you live – which depends on **where** you live. Even in a wealthy country like the UK there is a gap between the life expectancy of those that live in the richest areas and those that live in the poorest. At a global level the difference is much more stark.

Life expectancy in years



Poverty and ill health are strongly linked:

Some of the poorest countries in the world are in sub-Saharan Africa. The region is heavily affected by HIV and AIDS. Of the 2.7 million new infections around the world in 2008, 1.4 million of these were in sub-Saharan Africa – that's 71 per cent. (Source: UNAIDS) In 2008 only 52% of people in developing countries had access to proper toilets and washing facilities. The lack of these facilities leads to outbreaks of diarrhoea and other serious illnesses that kill millions of children and adults. (Millennium Development Goals Report 2010 UN)

FACT

Women dying in childbirth per 100,000 births:
UK = 12, Somalia = 1,200 (WHO statistics report 2010)



Hana with her daughter Salem, 10 months, who receives emergency nutrition from CAFOD partner, the Eritrean Catholic Secretariat.

Health care

Many poor countries cannot afford to invest in hospitals, training or health education. Where health care is available, people often have to pay and can't afford it. So people are more likely to get ill and less likely to have access to treatment or information that would prevent illness. If they are ill, they may not be able to work, afford to send their children to school or buy decent food for the family. The poverty trap continues.



Spending on health as a percentage of GDP (country's income)

Germany:	10.4
UK:	8.4
Sudan:	3.5
Pakistan:	2.7
Republic of Congo:	2.4

Source: World Health Organisation statistics 2010

Women's health



There is a clear connection between women's health and development goals such as eradicating extreme poverty, reducing child deaths and combating disease. Women's health affects their children in many ways. Women's health is also linked to their status in society and, for many, discrimination begins before they are born and continues throughout their lives.

- The leading cause of death for 15-19 year olds in developing countries is directly linked to complications in pregnancy, with an estimated 70,000 girls dying globally every year.
- In Africa, only 45 per cent of pregnant women with HIV receive drugs to prevent the virus passing to their children – in Europe the figure is 94 per cent (WHO statistics 2010).
- 80 per cent of maternal deaths could be prevented by ensuring that women have access to maternity and health care services. (UNICEF 2009).

TRY THIS

- Discuss ways in which discrimination might affect the health of women and girls
- Research and write an article: "The way to improve the world's health is to focus on improving women's health"

“Care for mothers, newborns and children is at the heart of human progress and a country's well-being.”

Dr. Gertrude Mongella, former President of the Pan-African Parliament

Children and health

Young children are the most vulnerable:

- › Pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria and AIDS accounted for 43 per cent of all deaths in children under five worldwide in 2008.
- › About one in four children under the age of five are underweight. This is mainly due to lack of nutritious food, water, sanitation and health services.
- › Probability that a child will die before the age of five: UK = 6 in 1000, Chad = 209 in 1000

(UN Millennium Development Report 2010; WHO Statistics Report 2010)



How world health is being tackled

Global leaders agreed a major plan in 2000 to tackle health problems facing the poorest people in the world. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight international goals designed to help transform the lives of millions. Improving health is a key part of a number of the goals. Specific targets include cutting by two-thirds the number of children dying before their fifth birthday. The plan is to achieve the goals by 2015.

TRY THIS

- Find out about the major diseases and illnesses that affect people in developing countries. Discuss some of the reasons why they are so prevalent in these countries.

FACT

In Africa, a child dies every 45 seconds from malaria and the disease accounts for 20 per cent of all childhood deaths. It is preventable and curable.

Prevention is the key

CAFOD places special emphasis on supporting primary health care projects. These concentrate on prevention rather than cure, by tackling the reasons for ill health such as dirty water and poor nutrition. The projects use simple, low-cost methods at a local level.

- › In **Mozambique**, we support a network of HIV activists, volunteers who visit families and help them with everything from cooking to giving emotional support.
- › In **Brazil**, we support a children's nutrition service where around 100 sick and malnourished children receive nutritional supplements and nearly 400 children are checked at monthly weighing sessions.
- › In **Guatemala**, our partners train local people as health promoters in small rural communities. They are taught about natural medicine, as well as other health treatments. Medicines are expensive so natural remedies can be a cheap and effective substitute.

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of self and family” Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Photograph: Laura Donkin Illustration: Dylan Gibson Registered charity no. 285776

FACT

In 2009, 12,000 fewer children were dying every day in developing countries compared to 1990 because of health improvements such as mass immunisation (Millennium Development report 2010)

HIV and AIDS

Although fewer people are dying because of AIDS, the number of people living with HIV has gone up and it is still one of the leading causes of death globally. The HIV epidemic has held back development in many countries, particularly across Africa. Improved access to drugs treatment is helping lower death rates, but in 2008 still fewer than half of the people who needed treatment were receiving it (Millennium Development report 2010).

TRY THIS

- Use the World Health Organisation website to find out more about why primary health care is so important in developing countries (look under 'Health topics')

Challenges for the future

Health is improving all over the world but there are still many challenges. For example:

- › Although health in many poorer countries has improved dramatically there has been a *decline* in the quality of health of people in southern Africa (Human Development Report 2010).
- › Funding to fight killer illnesses in developing countries is still not enough – for example, estimates for spending on malaria in 2010 were far short of the \$6 billion needed (Millennium Development report 2010).
- › More access to health care doesn't always mean that the quality of health care is good.
- › As many developing countries become more urbanised, different health pressures will emerge, such as health problems caused by living in slums.
- › Increased movement of people and goods between countries means a growing risk of the spread of disease.



Useful websites

who.int

World Health Organisation

undp.org

United Nations Development Programme

unaids.org

United Nations AIDS Programme

All facts correct May 2011