

Newborn care



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The situation

How and why children die can tell us a lot about the different factors affecting children's health, like the levels of poverty in the community, whether or not health services are easily accessible and if quality services are available. In Namibia, neonatal mortality is high. One in every 60 babies dies in their first month of life and neonatal mortality accounts for half of all infant deaths and more than half of under-five deaths. The country's rate of maternal deaths, which has a direct bearing on the survival of newborns and young children, has more than doubled since 2000. Today, one in 230 women dies during pregnancy, childbirth or soon after the delivery.

These newborn and maternal mortality rates are unacceptable for an upper middle income country. They point to inadequate priority being given to maternal and newborn health services, a lack of skilled staff in primary health care clinics, poor quality of maternal and newborn care, the narrow geographical reach of outreach services and delays in seeking health care and treatment.

UNICEF in action

UNICEF tackles neonatal mortality within a broader approach to improve access to integrated health services at community and facility levels. The aim is to provide 85 per cent of mothers, newborns and children with access to integrated health services by 2018. Working with the Ministry of Health and Social Services to increase national spending on primary health care and monitoring the implementation of the 2014–2018 Child Survival Strategy are also priorities.

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Neonatal mortality in Namibia is

20 in 1,000
live births



Namibia's maternal mortality rate is

385 in 100,000
live births

97% of pregnant women receive antenatal care but only 63% do the recommended four visits



87% of births take place in a health facility. However, only 68% of them received postnatal care follow-up



18% of women attending antenatal care are HIV-positive, compared to 16.7% for the general adult female population

Source: Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2013

Results for children

UNICEF Namibia played a key technical and financial role in the development of the 2014–2018 Child Survival Strategy under the umbrella of the 'A Promise Renewed', a global movement aimed at stopping women and children from dying of preventable causes. The costed strategy was accompanied by the reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health scorecard, which will be used to monitor the delivery of integrated health services for children and women.

Children and women in remote rural areas now stand a better chance of accessing health services through the UNICEF-supported Health Extension Programme (HEP) initiative. Started as a pilot project in Opuwo district of Kunene region in 2012 with the support of UNICEF, later the Government of Namibia invested US\$18 million to scale up to all 14 regions by 2017. A total of 1,366 health extension workers from 11 regions were trained and deployed in their respective communities by mid-2015.

In addition, 90 community-based maternal and newborn care volunteers were trained on community-based maternal and newborn care (CBMNC) in Kavango East and West regions. The overall aim is to bring maternal and newborn care services to hard-to-reach communities and bring health services closer to the people. The National Health Training Center (NHTC), an extended arm of the Ministry of Health and Social Services, is responsible for training of different cadres of health care providers. The NHTC has since 2013 integrated the CBMNC component into the health extension worker curriculum. This will lead to better follow-up of mothers and their newborn babies at community level.

UNICEF also supported the training of more than 100 health care providers from the Ministry of Health and Social Services on other programmes that are proven to save the lives of mothers and babies: helping babies breathe, focused antenatal care and emergency obstetric and newborn care.

Capacity development of health care workers needs to be accompanied by the right kind of equipment and supplies. In 2014, UNICEF provided newborn medical equipment worth US\$137,880 to health facilities and health extension workers in seven northern regions with high newborn mortality rates. This included infant and child resuscitators, respiration timers, infant scales, newborn incubators and thermometers. The supplies are making it possible to respond more effectively and quickly to maternal and newborn health issues.

What more needs to be done?

UNICEF will continue supporting high impact strategies, plans and programmes to improve neonatal survival. This will include:

- Providing technical and financial support to the development of a comprehensive costed newborn care strategy and action plan. The strategy and action plan will be aligned with the Global Every Newborn Action Plan and will include the latest cost effective, evidence-based newborn survival interventions that policy makers, programme managers and grassroot implementers can take to save the lives of newborns.
- Providing more support to procure neonatal lifesaving equipment, such as neonatal equipment in facilities and community-based equipment for health extension workers, e.g. infant weighing scales and thermometers.

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UNICEF partners in newborn and maternal health

- Ministry of Health and Social Services
- Namibia Planned Parenthood Association
- United Nations Population Fund
- United States Agency for International Development
- World Health Organization



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