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SCALE



# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

## PROFILE OF PRETERM AND LOW BIRTH WEIGHT PREVENTION AND CARE



Updated May 2017

Newborns are perhaps the most vulnerable population the world over. Preterm or babies born too early, less than 37 weeks gestation, are particularly at risk. Currently, prematurity is the leading cause of death among children under five around the world, and a leading cause of disability and ill health later in life. Sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia account for over 60 percent of preterm births worldwide. Of the fifteen million babies born too early each year, more than one million die due to complications related to preterm birth. Low birth weight (newborns weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth), due to prematurity and/or restricted growth in utero, is also a major contributor of newborn and child deaths, as well as disability and non-communicable diseases globally.

Nearly 85 percent of preterm babies are born between 32 and 37 weeks gestation and most of these babies do not need intensive care to survive. Solutions to improve the survival and health of vulnerable preterm and low birth weight babies exist. Essential newborn care (drying, warming, immediate and exclusive breastfeeding, hygiene and cord care) as well as basic care for feeding support, infections and breathing difficulties can mean the difference between life and death for small babies. More effort is needed to identify women at risk of preterm labor and support them to give birth in a health facility that can offer extra care when needed, such as support for adequate feeding with breast milk, continuous skin to skin contact, antibiotics, and antenatal corticosteroids. To do this, it is critical that families, communities and

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 382,000 babies are born too soon each year and 38,200 children under five die due to direct preterm complications.

health care workers value small babies so that they receive the life-saving care they need. To turn the tide on these preventable deaths, we need action across the spectrum of care from adolescence and preconception, pregnancy, the safe management of labor and delivery, and effective immediate and later postnatal care.

Current, local data are crucial to inform priorities and drive scale-up. This national level profile provides the most current national-level information on the status of prevention and care for preterm birth and low birth weight in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Data presented highlight a number of risk factors relevant to preterm and low birth weight in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as the coverage of important care for women and newborns from pregnancy, labor and delivery and the postnatal period. There is also

information that provides insights into the health workforce, health policies, health information and community mobilization relevant to preterm birth and low birth weight.

The information provided here can be used to understand the current situation, increase attention to preterm births in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to inform dialogue and action among stakeholders. Data can be used to identify the most important risk factors to target and gaps in care in order to identify and implement solutions for improved outcomes.

Much is already being done to prevent preterm birth and low birth weight and to improve outcomes for small babies. A safe and healthy start to life is at the heart of human capital and economic progress in every country, making care for small babies an essential investment in both the short- and long-term. As government leaders, civil society organizations, health workers, families, communities and other partners come together to enact change, we can prevent babies from being born too early and too small, and ensure that small babies get the critical life-saving care and nurturing they need.

### Democratic Republic of the Congo - National Clinical Standards for Care of Preterm Newborns at the Hospital Level

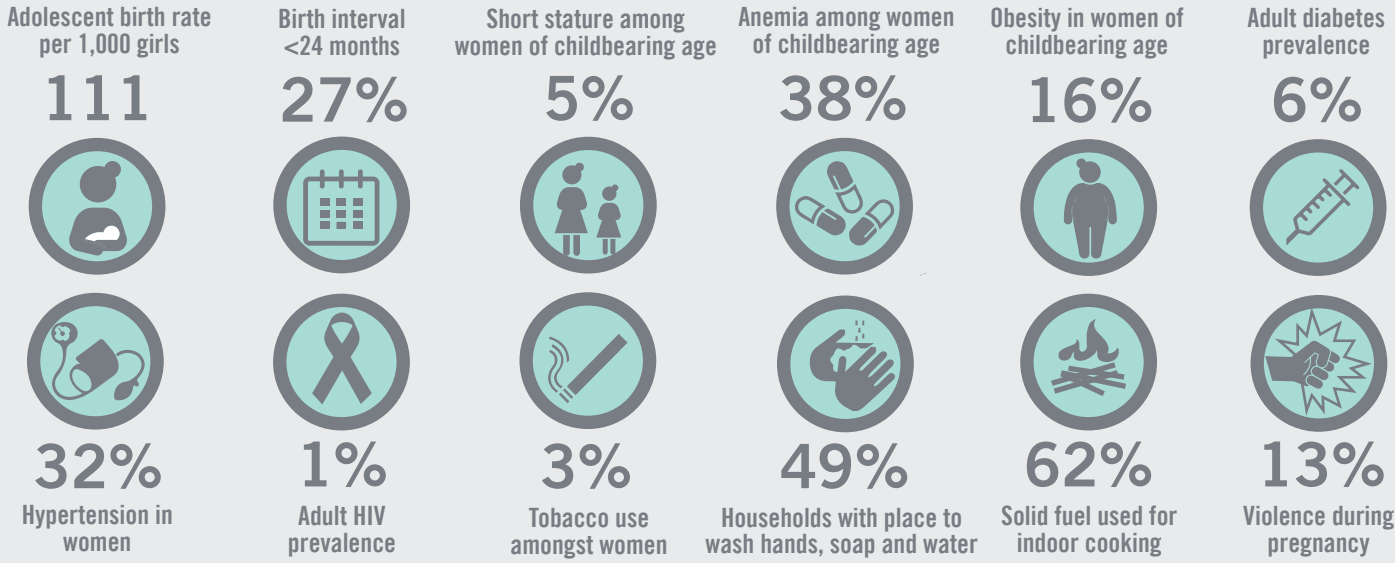
✓ ACS	✓ Tocolytics	✓ Magnesium Sulfate	✗ Antibiotics for pPROM	✗ No antibiotics w/ intact membranes
✗ Vaginal birth preference	✓ KMC	✗ CPAP for RDS	✗ Safe oxygen	✗ Surfactant

Based on the 10 elements of care recommended by WHO for improved preterm birth outcomes.





## RISK FACTORS FOR PRETERM BIRTH

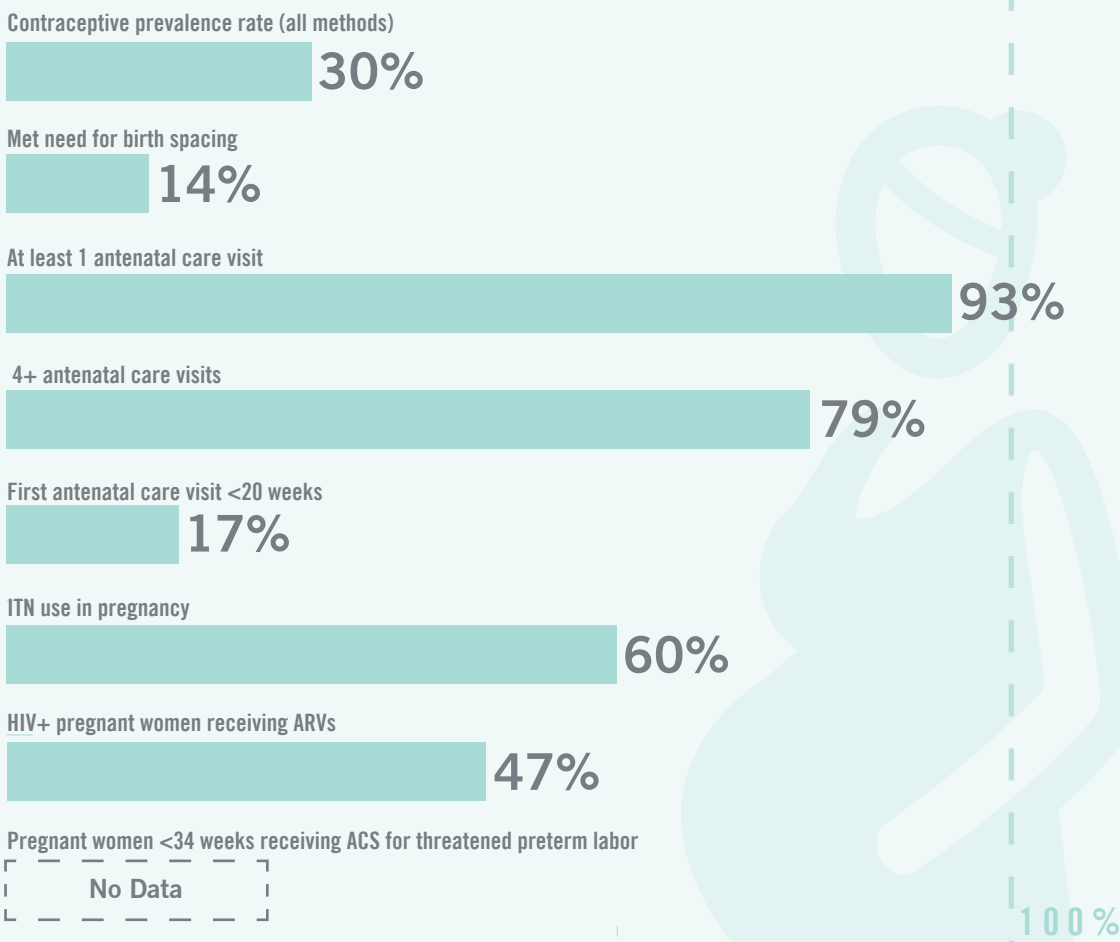


## DEMOGRAPHICS

Total population: <b>77,267,000</b>	
Annual births: <b>3,217,000</b>	
Total fertility rate per woman: <b>5.9</b>	
Per 100,000 live births	Total
Maternal deaths: <b>693 (436)</b>	<b>22,300</b>
Per 1,000 total births	Total
Stillbirths: <b>27.3</b>	<b>87,800</b>
Per 1,000 live births	Total
Neonatal deaths: <b>30 (21)</b>	<b>94,250</b>
Infant deaths: <b>75 (36)</b>	<b>233,300</b>
Under 5 deaths: <b>98 (52)</b>	<b>304,600</b>

*\*Numbers in parentheses refer to mortality estimates from recent national household survey*

## REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & CARE DURING PREGNANCY



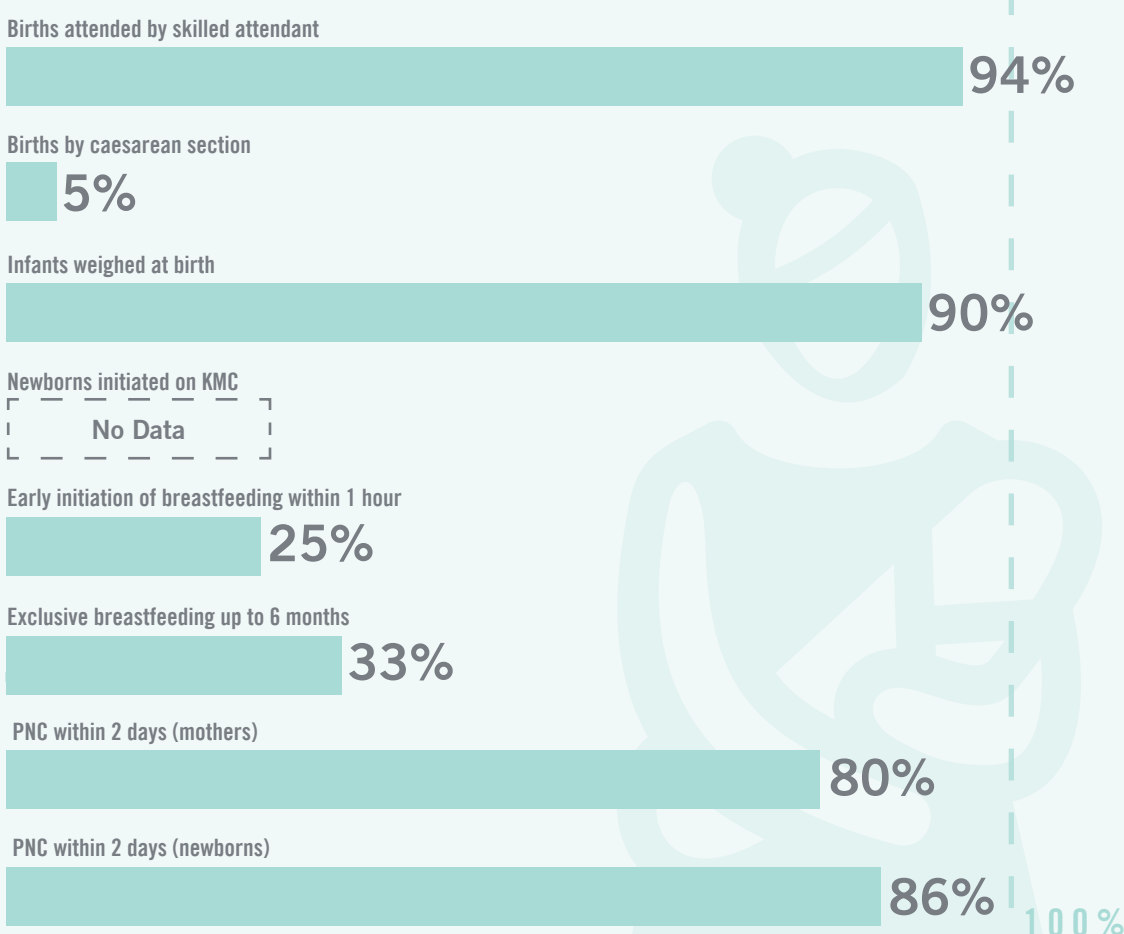
## PRETERM BIRTHS AND DEATHS

Preterm birth rate (babies born <37 weeks): **12%**  
 Low birth weight rate (babies born <2,500g): **10%**  
 Babies born preterm per year: **382,000**  
 Ratio of boys to girls born preterm: **1.17**  
 Babies born per year <28 weeks: **17,200**  
 Impaired preterm survivors per year: **8,300**  
 Direct preterm child deaths per year: **38,200**

## HEALTH FACILITY READINESS



## BIRTH & POSTNATAL CARE



### HEALTH WORKFORCE

Number of physicians, nurses and midwives per 10,000 population: **6.4**  
 Clinical standards for preterm care at hospital level: **4/10**  
 Nursing students receive formal education in neonatal care: **No**

### HEALTH POLICY

National plan for RMNCAH: **Yes**  
 RMNCAH plans include preterm component: **Yes**  
 Policy for kangaroo care: **Yes**  
 Policy for antenatal corticosteroids use: **Yes**  
 Policy for safe oxygen use and CPAP: **No**

### HEALTH INFORMATION

Perinatal mortality audit in policy: **No**  
 Birthweight captured in health management information system: **Yes**  
 Gestational age captured in health management information system: **No**

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

National advocacy group for parents of preterm babies: **No**  
 Preterm included in national RMNCAH behaviour change strategy: **No**

# DEFINITIONS AND DATA SOURCES

## DEMOGRAPHICS

<b>Total population</b>	Data from UN Population Division. [1]
<b>Annual number of live births</b>	Data from UN Population Division. [1]
<b>Total fertility rate</b>	Number of children who would be born per woman if she lived to the end of her childbearing years and bore children at each age, in accordance with prevailing age-specific fertility rates. [1]
<b>Maternal mortality ratio</b>	Number of deaths of women from pregnancy-related causes per 100,000 live births during the same time period. [2] Numbers in parentheses refer to national household survey mortality estimates. [9]
<b>Annual number of maternal deaths</b>	Number of deaths of women from pregnancy-related causes. [2]
<b>Stillbirth rate</b>	Probability of third trimester stillbirth $\geq 1000$ g birthweight or $\geq 28$ weeks of gestation), expressed per 1,000 births. [3]
<b>Annual number of stillbirths</b>	Number of stillbirths ( $\geq 1000$ g birthweight or $\geq 28$ weeks of gestation). [3]
<b>Neonatal mortality rate</b>	Probability of dying between 0 to 28 days expressed per 1,000 live births. [4] Numbers in parentheses refer to national household survey mortality estimates. [9]
<b>Annual number of neonatal deaths</b>	Number of children who die during the first 28 completed days of life
<b>Infant mortality rate</b>	Probability of dying between 0 to 365 days expressed per 1,000 live births. [4] Numbers in parentheses refer to national household survey mortality estimates. [9]
<b>Annual number of infant deaths</b>	Number of children who die during the first year of life. [4]
<b>Under-5 mortality rate</b>	Probability of dying between birth and exactly 5 years of age, expressed per 1,000 live births. [4] Numbers in parentheses refer to national household survey mortality estimates. [9]
<b>Annual number of under-5 deaths</b>	Number of children who die between birth and exactly 5 years of age. [4]

## PRETERM BIRTHS AND DEATHS

<b>Preterm birth rate</b>	Probability of baby being born alive before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy, expressed per 100 live births. [5]
<b>Low birth weight rate</b>	Percentage of infants weighing less than 2500g at birth. [1]
<b>Number of preterm births</b>	Number of babies born alive before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy. [5]
<b>Ratio of boys to girls born preterm</b>	Ratio of baby boys to baby girls born alive before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy. [5]
<b>Extreme preterm babies (&lt;28 weeks)</b>	Number of babies born alive before 28 completed weeks of pregnancy. [5]
<b>Impaired preterm survivors</b>	Number of preterm babies who survive with moderate or severe neurodevelopmental impairment. [6]
<b>Direct preterm child deaths per year</b>	Number of deaths amongst children under 5 years of age directly due to preterm birth complications. [7]

## HEALTH FACILITY READINESS

<b>Delivery facilities with antenatal corticosteroids in stock</b>	Percentage of facilities conducting deliveries with either dexamethasone or betamethasone in stock. [8]
<b>Delivery facilities with neonatal bag and mask in stock</b>	Percentage of facilities conducting deliveries with ambu bag and neonatal size mask in stock. [No data]
<b>Delivery facilities with space for kangaroo mother care</b>	Percentage of facilities conducting deliveries with space designated for kangaroo mother care. [No data]

## COVERAGE OF CARE

<b>Contraceptive prevalence rate</b>	Percentage of women age 15–49 in union currently using contraception. [9a]
<b>Met need for birth spacing</b>	Percentage of women in union who are using contraception and who wish to postpone their next birth. [9b]
<b>At least 1 antenatal care visit</b>	Percentage of women attended by any provider at least once during pregnancy. [9a]
<b>4+ antenatal care visits</b>	Percentage of women attended by any provider at least four times during pregnancy. [9a]
<b>First antenatal visit &lt;20 weeks</b>	Percentage of women less than 4 months pregnant at time of first antenatal visit. [9b]
<b>ITN use in pregnancy</b>	Percentage of pregnant women using an insecticide treated bednet the night before the survey. [9a]
<b>HIV+ pregnant women receiving ARVs</b>	Percentage of pregnant women testing HIV-positive during visits to antenatal clinics who were provided with antiretrovirals (ARVs) to prevent mother-to-child transmission. [10]
<b>Women &lt;34 weeks receiving ACS</b>	Percentage of women <34 weeks gestation receiving antenatal corticosteroids for threatened preterm labor. [No data]
<b>Births attended by skilled attendant</b>	Percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel (doctors, nurses or midwives). [9a]
<b>Births by caesarean section</b>	Percentage of births delivered by caesarean section. Caesarean section rates between 5 per cent and 15 percent may reveal adequate levels of emergency obstetric care. [9a]
<b>Infants weighed at birth</b>	Percentage of babies weighed at the time of birth. [9a]
<b>Newborns initiated on KMC</b>	Percentage of babies receiving KMC. [No data]
<b>Early initiation of breastfeeding</b>	Percentage of infants who are put to the breast within one hour of birth. [9a]
<b>Exclusive breastfeeding up to six months</b>	Percentage of infants aged 0–5 months who were fed exclusively with breast milk in the past 24 hours. [9a]
<b>PNC within 2 days (mothers)</b>	Percentage of women with a live birth in the 5 years preceding the survey who received postnatal care (PNC) for their most recent live birth within two days of giving birth, and the percentage of last-born newborns in the 5 years preceding the survey who received PNC during the first 2 days. [9a]
<b>PNC within 2 days (newborns)</b>	

## RISK FACTORS FOR PRETERM BIRTH

<b>Adolescent birth rate</b>	Number of births per 1,000 adolescent girls aged 15–19. [9a]
<b>Birth interval &lt;24 months</b>	Percentage of women with two live births within 24 months. [9b]
<b>Female short stature</b>	Percentage of women age 15-49 less than 145cm tall. [9b]
<b>Anemia in women of childbearing age</b>	Percentage of women age 15-49 with anemia (cut-off <12.0 g/dl). [9b]
<b>Female obesity</b>	Percentage of women age 15-49 with a body mass index (expressed as the ratio of weight in kilograms to the square of height in meters (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )) of more than 25.0 kg/m <sup>2</sup> . [11]
<b>Diabetes prevalence in women</b>	Percentage of adult women with fasting glucose $\geq 126$ mg/dl (7.0 mmol/l) or on medication for raised blood glucose. [11]
<b>Hypertension in women</b>	Percentage of adult women with raised blood pressure (systolic blood pressure $\geq 140$ OR diastolic blood pressure $\geq 90$ ), or using antihypertensive medication. [11]
<b>Adult HIV prevalence</b>	Percentage of adults living with HIV. [11]
<b>Tobacco use amongst women</b>	Percentage of women age 15-49 who smoke cigarettes or a pipe or use other tobacco products. [9a]
<b>Households with place to wash hands, soap and water</b>	Percentage of households with a place for washing hands that includes water, soap/ other cleansing agents. [9a]
<b>Household solid fuel for indoor cooking</b>	Percentage of households using solid fuel for cooking indoors. [9a]
<b>Violence against women in pregnancy</b>	Percentage of women age 15-49 who have ever experienced physical violence during pregnancy. [9b]

## HEALTH WORKFORCE

<b>Health worker density per 10,000 population</b>	Number of medical doctors (physicians), including generalist and specialist medical practitioners, nursing and midwifery personnel per 10,000 population. [12]
<b>Clinical standards for preterm care at hospital level</b>	Number of 10 critical elements of preterm care (antenatal corticosteroids, tocolytics, magnesium sulphate, antibiotics for preterm premature rupture of membranes, no antibiotics with intact membranes, vaginal birth preference, kangaroo mother care, continuous positive airway pressure for respiratory distress, safe oxygen therapy, surfactant) included in national clinical standards or guidelines. [13]
<b>Nursing students receive formal education in neonatal care</b>	Yes: Diploma or certificate program available for nurses in newborn care / No: No formal additional certification. [13]

## HEALTH POLICY

<b>National plan for RMNCAH</b>	Yes: Costed plan or plans to scale up maternal, newborn and child health interventions available at the national level. / Partial: Costed plan available but not for all components. / No: No costed implementation plan for maternal, newborn and child health available. [14]
<b>RMNCAH plans includes preterm components</b>	Yes: RMNCAH strategy includes mention of any critical elements of preterm care. / No: No mention of any critical elements of preterm care. [13]
<b>Policy for KMC</b>	Yes: National policy recommends Kangaroo Mother Care for low birth weight newborns. / No: National policy does not recommend Kangaroo Mother Care for low birth weight newborns. [14]
<b>Policy for ACS use</b>	Yes: National policy recommends use of antenatal corticosteroids for preterm labor. / No: National policy does not recommend use of antenatal corticosteroids for preterm labor. [14]
<b>Policy for safe oxygen use and CPAP</b>	Yes: National policy specifies safe oxygen use when continuous positive airway pressure is administered. / No: National policy does not specify safe oxygen use. [13]

## HEALTH INFORMATION

<b>Perinatal mortality audit in policy</b>	National policy adopted requiring health workers to review perinatal deaths occurring in health facilities. Yes: national policy in place / No: No national policy. [13]
<b>Birthweight captured in health management information system</b>	Place to capture birthweight on facility registers, or in annual health sector reports, where forms or registers were not available. [13]
<b>Gestational age captured in health management information system</b>	Place to capture gestational age in weeks, on facility registers, or in annual health sector reports, where forms or registers were not available. [13]

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

<b>National advocacy group for parents of preterm babies</b>	Yes: Existence of at least one support group for parents and family members affected by preterm birth. / No: No group information available. [13]
<b>Preterm included in national RMNCAH behaviour change strategy</b>	Yes: Messages regarding preterm birth are included in national strategy. No: National behavior change strategy does not include preterm birth messages OR no national behavior change strategy. [13]

### DATA SOURCES:

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14. UNICEF and WHO. Countdown to 2015. A decade of tracking progress for maternal, newborn and child survival: the 2015 report. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2015.