

## Protect, Treat, Prevent

For the first time ever, pneumonia will have its day on the world stage. Pneumonia kills two million children every year – more than AIDS, malaria and measles combined.<sup>1</sup> With the designation of the first World Pneumonia Day this November 2, the common goal is to change that, and to urge policymakers to prioritize pneumonia as an urgent public health matter.

The World Pneumonia Day identifies a three-tiered approach to tackling the world's deadliest killer of children.

**Protect** children from pneumonia by ensuring their proper nutrition, starting with exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life. Adequate nutrition makes children less vulnerable to pneumonia and other infectious diseases; exclusive breastfeeding acts as a child's first immunization by providing the nutrients needed to fight off disease. Boosting weakened immune systems with zinc supplements can reduce the incidence of childhood pneumonia by up to 41 percent.<sup>2</sup> Limiting a child's exposure to indoor air pollution and tobacco smoke can also reduce a child's risk of pneumonia-related morbidity and mortality.<sup>3</sup>

**Treat** pneumonia cases immediately with an appropriate course of antibiotics. The major challenge in treatment and prevention of pneumonia-related morbidity and mortality is recognition of the symptoms. Parents and caregivers are the first line of defense, and teaching them to recognize the warning signs is vital, especially in developing countries where chest x-rays are often not an option. When symptoms are present, early diagnosis and treatment using antibiotics that cost less than a dollar can save tens of thousands of lives a year, yet few children with pneumonia receive the antibiotic therapy they need.

**Prevent** children from developing pneumonia in the first place. Given the economic toll of pneumonia treatment on families and the chances that this disease will result in death, particularly in the developing world, vaccination remains critical for controlling pneumonia morbidity and mortality. There are safe, effective vaccines against the common bacterial causes of pneumonia, including pneumococcal disease and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib). These vaccines are used widely in wealthy countries, and the results are telling: for every child that dies from pneumonia in the industrialized world, more than 2000 die in developing countries.<sup>4</sup> Funding is now available through the GAVI Alliance for low-resource countries to purchase these vaccines, and the time for governments to apply for these funds is now.

As scientists, this information is not new to us. It is up to us to use the World Pneumonia Day to help more people worldwide and – most importantly, to let those who make public health policy decisions understand that the price of action will be measured in dollars, but the price of inaction will be measured in lost lives.

To learn more, visit [www.worldpneumoniaday.org](http://www.worldpneumoniaday.org).

Javier Garau, ESCMID President

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. Pneumonia: The Forgotten Killer of Children (2006). [Online]. Available: [http://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_35626.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_35626.html).

<sup>2</sup> Black RE. J Nutrition 2003; 1485S-1489S.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF. Pneumonia: The Forgotten Killer of Children (2006). [Online]. Available: [http://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_35626.html](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_35626.html).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.