



One and a half million children would not have died in 2011 had they been immunized, according to [UNICEF](#) at the start of [World Immunization Week](#) . But one in five children is not being reached with vital vaccines due to social or geographical exclusion, lack of resources, weak health systems or conflicts such as those raging today in Syria and parts of West Africa.

Every infant in the world needs to be immunized to better protect their health, and vaccines are estimated to save the lives of 2 to 3 million children each year – representing one of the ten greatest achievements in public health of the last century, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Immunization is also highly cost effective. For instance, it costs less than US\$1 to protect a child against measles for life.

In 2011, however, 22.4 million children were not immunized – an increase of over one million from the preceding year.

UNICEF is concerned that global efforts to vaccinate every child are plateauing as funding falls

and political will stagnates. In 2011, only 152 out of 193 World Health Organization member states had dedicated budget lines for immunization.

Inequalities persist within and between countries. Children from wealthy families have the greatest access to the best health services in any given country, and they enjoy the highest rates of immunization coverage.

Unless disparities are addressed every last child cannot be immunized, says UNICEF. At the same time, investment in routine immunization as part of improved health care systems will benefit all children – thus further reducing inequities. To do so, governments have to provide sufficient funding and innovation should be encouraged – such as the recent introduction of vaccines against pneumonia and diarrhoea.

And, most importantly, unwavering political support is needed to extend the benefits of vaccines to children living in the poorest families and the most remote communities.

### **UNICEF’s unique position**

UNICEF procures vaccines that reach 36 per cent of the world’s children. In 2012, UNICEF procured almost 1.9 billion doses of vaccine and over 500 million syringes. As the largest buyer of vaccines in the world, UNICEF works to keep vaccine prices at levels that low- and middle-income countries can afford. UNICEF and its partners supported immunization programmes in over 100 countries last year.

At country level, UNICEF and partners support governments in optimising immunization supply chains so that cold chain equipment and logistics effectively maintain vaccines at stable temperatures at every step of storage and transportation until the child is reached. And UNICEF also works to increase community awareness and acceptance of immunization.

When emergencies occur, children are more vulnerable, and immunization campaigns become critically important. One of the first highly contagious diseases to appear in humanitarian situations is measles, outbreaks of which have been reported recently in Syria, Pakistan, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The enormous impact of immunization and the challenges to vaccination are starkly apparent in the crisis in Syria. Last year, UNICEF and its partners vaccinated 1.3 million children against measles and 1.5 million against polio, and a campaign is now under way to reach 2.5 million children with measles vaccinations. However, a combination of limited funds, enormous challenges to access and mass population movements are making it harder than ever to reach every child.

Concerted efforts to immunize children have reduced or eliminated the incidence of devastating illnesses:

- Smallpox was eradicated in 1980. Polio was recently eliminated in India and is now endemic in only three countries: Pakistan, Nigeria and Afghanistan.
- Between 2000 and 2011, measles deaths dropped 71 per cent worldwide.
- 29 countries eliminated neo-natal tetanus between 2000 and 2013.

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