

World Prematurity Day

Premature birth: leading cause of death for children under 5

STAR HEALTH REPORT

According to a recent study published in The Lancet, complications from preterm birth accounted for more than 1 million deaths in 2013, surpassing pneumonia as the leading cause of under-5 child mortality in the year. Nearly a million of these deaths took place within the first month of life, with the remaining 125,000 deaths taking place before age 5. Many other premature babies who survive face a lifetime disability, including learning disabilities and visual and hearing problems — often at great cost to families and society.

14 out of 100 babies born prematurely in Bangladesh, more than the global average! Bangladesh is among the 10 countries with the highest numbers of children under-five dying from preterm birth complications. Preterm birth complications are the leading cause of death in newborns and accounts for 45% of all newborn deaths in Bangladesh which was 36% in 2000.



These figures should indicate an urgent call for concerted action. Dr Sayed Rubayet, Project Director of Saving Newborn Lives (SNL) of Save the Children said that tackling premature birth complications is one of the greatest health challenges the world is facing. However, the awareness and interventions to prevent and treat complications related to premature births are still very poor and needs to move higher up on global agenda.

He also added that many people think that preterm babies need intensive, high-tech care, but we have simple methods such as warmth, breastfeeding support, basic care for preventing infections and breathing difficulties, that could reduce the deaths by over three-quarters, even without the availability of costly neonatal intensive care. Among the interventions — Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC), antenatal steroid injections (when indicated), antiseptic

cream to prevent cord infection and antibiotics to fight infections are particularly important. In KMC, mothers serve as human incubators for their newborns where the infant is held skin-to-skin on the mother's chest to keep warm. This low cost, highly effective technique has the potential to save millions of babies born too soon and also reduce the need of costly incubators. But the service is not available throughout Bangladesh and thus, it is crucial to make it available.

Antenatal steroid injection called corticosteroid is a low cost drug that helps develop immature fetal lungs and prevent respiratory problems and is particularly indicated for women before 34 weeks of pregnancy.

To prevent infection in newborn, a simple antiseptic named Chlorhexidine (7.1%) application on umbilical cord can reduce neonatal infection and mortality significantly.

This is particularly important for a country like Bangladesh where many infants are born at home, deliveries are often conducted by unskilled birth attendants and care provided during labour, delivery along with the immediate postnatal periods are often unhygienic or include harmful practices. In addition, simple antibiotics can save lives, such as amoxicillin and gentamycin to treat newborn infections.

In order to help reduce preterm birth rates, family planning and increased empowerment of women, especially adolescents, plus improved quality of care before, between and during pregnancy, strategic investments in innovation and research are also crucial.

INNOVATION

Increasing choice of contraceptive for women and girls

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and Pfizer Inc. announced an agreement that will enable Sayana® Press, an injectable contraceptive to be sold for US\$1 per dose to qualified purchasers. This will significantly expand access to an easy-to-use and effective injectable contraceptive, enabling women and adolescents in 69 of the world's poorest countries to have access at a reduced or no cost.

More than 200 million women in developing countries want to delay pregnancy or prevent undesired pregnancy but are not using any method of contraception.

Injectable contraceptives are a widely-used family planning method among women in developing countries, where the lifetime risk for death due to a maternal cause can be as high as 1 in 15. In many developing countries, women must return to a clinic or health post every three months for a new injection from a skilled health worker, limiting access in remote and other hard-to-reach areas. Accordingly, experts have identified the need for a contraceptive method that can be administered in low-resource, non-clinic settings. Because of its delivery technology, expanding access to Sayana® Press could help fill this gap.

The agreement builds on the momentum of recent efforts undertaken by the consortium of public and private organisations on an introduction programme to help make Sayana® Press available for the first time in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and Uganda), coordinated by PATH, and in South Asia (Bangladesh).

HEALTH bulletin

World Diabetes Day

Off to the right start

The latest estimates from the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) indicate that there are 382 million people living with diabetes worldwide. By 2035, one in ten persons will have diabetes. A further 316 million people are currently at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes, with the number expected to increase to almost 500 million within a generation.

These facts and figures reiterate the importance of urgent action to protect people at risk and our future generation. In order to raise awareness on the risk and complications associated with diabetes and its prevention, World Diabetes Day is being observed on November 14 each year. Between 2014 and 2016, *Health Living and Diabetes* is the theme of World Diabetes Day.

This year, the day especially highlighted the importance of eating healthy to help prevent type 2 diabetes and avoid the serious complications. The day also promoted the benefits of starting the day with a healthy breakfast, which can help individuals manage their weight and, for people living with diabetes, keep blood glucose levels stable.

Experts say that over 70% of type 2 diabetes cases can be prevented or delayed by adopting healthier lifestyles. Type 2 diabetes is the most common diabetes occurs in adult and where insulin is reduced or resistant rather than absolute deficiency as seen in type 1 diabetes.

Eating a healthy breakfast is one of the major changes that helps to control appetite and blood glucose



concentrations in both adults and children. Moreover, skipping breakfast is associated with weight gain which is one of the main risk factors for type 2 diabetes. Overweight and obesity account for up to 80% of new cases of type 2 diabetes.

Here are some recommendations from the IDF those help people with diabetes to achieve stable control:

- Choosing water or unsweetened coffee or tea instead of fruit juice, soda and other sugar sweetened beverages.
- Eating at least three servings of vegetables every day, including green leafy vegetables such as spinach, lettuce or kale.
- Eating up to three servings of fresh fruit every day.

- Choosing nuts, a piece of fresh fruit or sugar-free yoghurt for a snack.
- Choosing lean cuts of white meat, poultry and seafood instead of processed meat or red meat.
- Choosing peanut butter instead of chocolate spread or jam to spread on bread.
- Choosing whole-grain bread instead of white bread, brown rice instead of white rice, whole grain pasta instead of refined pasta.
- Choosing unsaturated fats (olive oil, canola oil, corn oil, or sunflower oil) instead of saturated fats (butter, ghee, animal fat, coconut oil or palm oil).

The write up is compiled by an endocrinologist Dr Shahjada Selim. Email: selimshahjada@gmail.com

Community health workers help tackling pneumonia

DR TAPASH ROY and DR SADIA

Pneumonia is a common disease that affects the lungs and a major cause of childhood mortality and morbidity in developing countries like Bangladesh where it contributes to about a quarter of all deaths among children under the age of five years.

Although safe and low cost antibiotics are available in Bangladesh for prevention and control of pneumonia, 46% of cases received care from unqualified providers and 17% received no treatment at all. In order to provide adequate access to timely treatment within the crucial window of 24 hours after the onset of symptoms of pneumonia, BRAC and some other development organisations have introduced a system for the management of pneumonia extending services beyond the health facilities by engaging and training the frontline community health workers (CHWs), so that more children have access to life saving interventions and treatment.

The community health workers of BRAC, known as Shasthya Shebikas, are trained in identification / diagnosis of pneumonia cases and providing treatment using the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended antibiotics at household level. They also identify children with severe pneumonia for immediate referral to nearby hospitals.

BRAC's Shasthya Shebika model indicates that it is possible to reduce the burden of pneumonia by training and engaging CHWs to implement community-based case management and prevention strategies.

Pneumonia should not be allowed to take so many children's lives every year. In order to remain on track to achieve MDG 4, we must reduce the number of children dying from pneumonia. World Pneumonia Day 2014 observed on November 12 reminds these messages.

Dr Roy and Dr Sadia Shabnam work at the Health, Nutrition and Population section of BRAC.



Bed position matters for stroke patients

Hospital bed positioning can be critical in the first 24 hours after a person suffers an ischemic stroke, according to a new report published recently in the journal *MedLink Neurology*.

Ischemic stroke is the most common type of stroke, which occurs when a clot blocks blood flow to the brain. Sitting upright can harm ischemic stroke patients because it decreases blood flow to the brain when it needs more blood, the researchers explained. It is best to keep these patients lying as flat as possible, the authors noted.

A purpose in life may extend yours

Having a sense of meaning and purpose in your life might do more than just give you focus — it might help you live longer, too, according to a new study published in *The Lancet*.

The study, involving people averaging 65 years of age, found that those who professed to feeling worthwhile and having a sense of purpose in life were less likely to die during the more than eight years the researchers tracked them.

Knowing for better living

Over 50% of kidney failure can be prevented !

- Drink plenty of water
- Control your blood pressure
- Check your diabetes regularly
- Maintain healthy weight
- Eat low-fat diet
- Avoid smoking & alcohol
- Consult your Doctor



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