



Introduction

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of bacterial and parasitic diseases that infect one in six people around the world, leading to declines in health, education and productivity.

Treating NTDs can positively impact maternal, newborn and child health programs, and contribute to progress in achieving Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5.

By reducing anemia, improving nutrition and strengthening a mother or child's immune system so they are able to fight off other diseases, NTD treatment programs can improve a population's overall health condition.

How NTDs Impact Maternal and Child Health

NTDs cause a variety of health complications for people of all ages. However, mothers and children are especially vulnerable. Without treatment, NTDs can:



Complicate Pregnancies

For the estimated 40 million women of reproductive age infected with hookworm in the developing world, the infection can cause serious health risks during pregnancy, including anemia. During childbirth, these women have a higher likelihood of experiencing complications and even death.

Endanger Newborns

Hookworm in the mother can also lead to complications for newborns – including low birth weight – which is an important risk factor for neonatal and infant mortality and morbidity. A study in rural Vietnam showed that providing women with regular deworming and weekly iron-folic acid supplements before pregnancy was associated with a reduced prevalence of low birth weight in newborns.

How NTDs Impact Maternal and Child Health

Without treatment, NTDs can:

Disfigure and Disable

NTDs such as trachoma, onchocerciasis (river blindness) and lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis) often lead to physical disabilities such as blindness or severe swelling of the arms, legs and other parts of the body, making it difficult for women to work or care for their families.

Impair Growth and Development

Several NTDs including intestinal worms and schistosomiasis (snail fever) can also cause malnutrition and impair physical growth. Children with chronic NTD infections typically experience stunted growth throughout their childhood.



Reduce Cognitive Abilities and Education

Some NTDs reduce children's abilities to attend and perform well in school. A study in Brazil showed that children infected with hookworm or multiple NTDs performed worse on tests of cognitive functions than their peers without these infections.

Deworming children is linked to a 25 percent decrease in school absenteeism. Improved cognitive function and increased school attendance positively impact an individual's earning potential.

Combining Efforts

Incorporating NTD control into existing efforts to improve maternal and child health provides an opportunity to guarantee healthier futures for mothers, children and their families.

Without the burden of NTDs, mothers are more likely to have healthy children and are better able to care for them. NTD control also provides these children with the opportunity to grow, learn and achieve their fullest potential.



NTD control helps to guarantee healthier futures for mothers, children and their families

More Information

For more information, please visit www.globalnetwork.org.