

Vitamin A deficiency puts 140 million children at risk of illness and death – UNICEF

More than 140 million children are at greater risk of illness, hearing loss, blindness and even death globally if urgent action is not taken to provide them with life-saving vitamin A supplements, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has warned.

In a new report "[Coverage at a Crossroads](#)," released on Monday, UNICEF stressed that just two doses of vitamin A per year, can save thousands of children's lives.

Vitamin A boosts the immune system and can help protect young children from potentially fatal diseases like measles and diarrhea.

The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) has classified vitamin A deficiency as "a public health problem" affecting about a third of all children aged 6 to 59 months – according to 2013 figures – with the highest rates registered in sub-Saharan Africa, at 48 per cent; and South Asia at 44 per cent.

The UNICEF report says only 64 per cent of children in need are receiving the life-saving benefits of vitamin A supplementation, leaving the remaining third, or more than 140 million children, without sufficient coverage.

The coverage of vitamin A supplement programmes dropped by more than half, in countries with the highest under-five mortality rates in 2016 – the countries where such programmes are needed the most.

As a result, the number of children left unprotected in high-mortality countries more than tripled between 2015 and 2016, jumping from 19 million to 62 million, the report notes.

Global coverage reached a six-year low in 2016, with the largest dip seen for West and Central Africa. On the contrary, targeting children in East Asia and the Pacific has proved effective, with more than 80 per cent of children there, receiving two-dose coverage over the past decade.

The report recommends that the global community incorporate vitamin A doses into other programmes to reach every child, strengthen monitoring to identify those yet to be reached, and expand knowledge overall concerning the most effective platforms.

Leaders obliged to confront anti-Semitism 'everywhere and always', stresses UN envoy

The United Nations' top official for the Middle East Peace Process has said that spreading "deeply disturbing" conspiracy theories which fuel anti-Semitism are unacceptable, and serve neither the interests of Palestinians themselves, or the pursuit of peace in the region.

UN Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov was responding to remarks which were made by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the opening of the Palestinian National Council on Monday.

According to news reports, the Palestinian leader suggested that the mass murder of European Jews during the Holocaust had been connected to their financial practices.

Mr Mladenov said in a [statement](#) on Wednesday that President Abbas "chose to use his speech at the opening of the Palestinian National Council to repeat some of the most contemptuous anti-Semitic slurs, including the suggestion that the social behaviour of Jews was the cause for the Holocaust."

"Leaders have an obligation to confront anti-Semitism everywhere and always, not perpetuate the conspiracy theories that fuel it," stressed Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov also reiterated that denying historic and religious connection of the Jewish people to the land and their holy sites in Jerusalem "stands in contrast to reality".

He also stressed that the Holocaust was the result of thousands of years of persecution and that it did not occur in a vacuum.

"This is why attempts to rewrite, downplay or deny it are dangerous," he said.

Central African Republic: UN urges calm in wake of violence in capital Bangui

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR)

has appealed for calm following fresh violence in the capital Bangui which claimed the lives of several civilians, including a religious leader.

“MINUSCA [the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR] condemns attacks against civilians and places of worship and emphasizes that such attacks are contrary to national and international laws,” the UN Mission said in a [statement](#).

It reaffirmed that only mandated State authorities have the right to enforce justice and that any acts by non-state actors, such as the attacks Tuesday morning, are illegal.

“The sponsors and the perpetrators of such acts will be held responsible,” added the Mission.

The clashes were sparked off by the arrest of a member of a criminal group by the country’s security forces. In the ensuing violence, a church was attacked on the edge of the predominantly Muslim PK5 neighbourhood, and a pastor was killed. Health facilities and medical staff were also reportedly threatened.

The violence later spread to other parts of the city.

The Humanitarian Coordinator in the CAR, Najat Rochdi, [denounced](#) the targeting of a religious institution by attackers, saying that it demonstrated a lack of respect due to all places of worship.

“I am shocked by the death of Father Tougoumalé-Baba who was one of the defenders of the pact of non-aggression,” she said, recalling that the agreement enables Muslims in the surrounding area to give their dead a befitting burial according to the precepts of Islam.

Also in a subsequent attack, two MINUSCA peacekeepers were wounded – one seriously – after they were reportedly pelted with stones by a crowd.

In accordance with its mandate, MINUSCA has deployed reinforced patrols to secure key locations in Bangui in close cooperation with the national security forces and is monitoring the situation.

It has also strengthened its presence in other parts of the country.

[UN ready to discuss ‘possible forms of support’ to further inter-Korean peace efforts](#)

Secretary-General António Guterres has said that the United Nations stands

ready to discuss “possible forms of support” to further inter-Korean talks over denuclearizing the Peninsula, and working towards a lasting peace.

That call for support includes UN assistance in verifying the imminent closure of a nuclear test site in the north, and transforming the buffer zone separating the two nations into a “peace zone.”

The UN [confirmed](#) Tuesday evening that Mr. Guterres and the Republic of Korea’s President Moon Jae-in spoke by phone on Monday, in which the latter sought “the support of the United Nations” to verify the shutting down of the nuclear test site in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Mr. Moon also asked the UN to help implement the recent agreement by the two nations to transform the demilitarized zone.

In response, the Secretary-General “reiterated the full support of the United Nations to furthering the inter-Korean dialogue and in this regard pledged that the United Nations stands ready to discuss possible forms of support,” according to a [read-out](#) issued by the world body.

On 27 April, the leaders of the two nations agreed on a number of measures, including realizing the common goal of “complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” and pursuing talks to declare an official end to the Korean War, which devastated the Peninsula, beginning in June 1950.

An armistice brought about a ceasefire in 1953, but the conflict never officially ended because the parties failed to reach agreement over a formal peace treaty.

Prior to last week’s historic inter-Korean summit, DPRK leader Kim Jong Un had announced his intention to suspend nuclear tests and intercontinental ballistic missile launches, and on Sunday said this would including the closure of the country’s nuclear test site next month, according to news reports.

The DPRK has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006, and in recent years launched numerous test missiles, in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The 15-member body has regularly reacted to these violations through punitive measures.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitors the DPRK nuclear programme, including through the use of satellite imagery, but its inspectors have not had access to the country’s nuclear facilities since April 2009.

90 per cent of the planet is breathing in polluted air – World Health Organization

Air pollution claims seven million lives a year, UN health experts said on Wednesday, amid new data showing that the problem affects nine out of ten people worldwide.

In a [call](#) for Member States to take action urgently, [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus, warned that air pollution “threatens us all, but the poorest and most marginalized people bear the brunt of the burden.”

According to WHO’s [ambient air quality database](#), despite some improvements, pollution levels are “still dangerously high” in most parts of the world.

This includes “many of the world’s megacities”, according to Dr Maria Neira, WHO’s Director of the Department of Public Health, Social and Environmental Determinants of Health, who added that air quality levels in those urban centres, exceed WHO guidelines “by more than five times”.

Covering more than 4,300 cities in 108 countries, the data points to an estimated 4.2 million deaths each year caused by outdoor air pollution, with 3.8 million fatalities overall, owing to household pollutants, linked to cooking.

More than 90 per cent of victims come from low- and middle-income countries in Asia and Africa, followed by others in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Europe and the Americas.

The threat to human health comes from exposure to near-invisible toxins that are present in polluted air as fine particles.

These pollutants – some of the most dangerous being sulfates, nitrates and black carbon – penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream and cause a range of diseases including stroke, heart disease, lung cancer and other respiratory infections.

According to WHO, global air pollution is linked to inefficient energy use in every sector of human activity: coal-fired power plants, industry, agriculture and transport.

Waste burning and deforestation are additional sources of air pollution, as are sand and desert dust, the agency says.

Inside people’s houses, the main source of air pollution stems from lack of access to clean cooking fuels.

It's a problem that affects more than 40 per cent of the world's population – some three billion people – a situation that the WHO Director-General described as “unacceptable”.

Although there are major gaps on air pollution data from regions including the Western Pacific and Africa – where information was available in only eight out of 47 countries on the continent – the WHO chief noted that the international community was “starting to pay attention and take action” on air pollution, recognizing it as a threat to sustainable development.

“The good news is that we are seeing more and more governments increasing commitments to monitor and reduce air pollution as well as more global action from the health sector and other sectors like transport, housing and energy,” he said.

WHO's Dr Neira echoed that message, highlighting “an acceleration of political interest in this global public health challenge”. But she noted that the increased commitment to recording air pollution data to date, had come mostly from high-income countries.

Countries that are taking measures to reduce air pollution include India, WHO says, where one new scheme has provided free gas connections for more than 37 million women, to help them make the switch to clean energy use in the home.

The publication of WHO's findings comes ahead of the first [Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health](#), which is due to run from 30 October to 1 November in Geneva, where the UN agency aims to push for improved air quality and combat the harmful effects of climate change.