



A HEALTHY START FOR EVERY NEWBORN

We aim to help pregnant women and newborns benefit from the support they need so all newborns survive and thrive.

Addressing Newborn Survival: the unfinished agenda

China has made enormous progress on maternal and child mortality reduction. However, newborn deaths are part of the “unfinished agenda” of the Millennium Development Goals in China and beyond.

The annual death toll remains high in China with newborn deaths accounting for about 50 per cent of all deaths among children under five years. Most deaths are caused by premature and low-birth weights, complications during labour and infections.

- 122,000 stillbirths annually in China, ranking top 5 in the world
- 100,000 newborn deaths per year in China, ranking top 6 in the world

There are significant regional disparities in newborn mortality rates with uneven coverage and quality of the most cost-effective interventions including skin-to-skin contact, delayed cord clamping and cutting, early initiation of breastfeeding, kangaroo mother care, as well as special care for sick newborns. Infants are two and a half times less likely to have health insurance than older children.

“Ensuring maternal and newborn survival is the first step in ensuring that every child can reach his or her fullest potential and societies can prosper, around the globe. ”

– Shahida Azfar
UNICEF Deputy Executive Director

Our programme

UNICEF seeks to accelerate progress toward a world in which no child dies of a preventable cause and no preventable stillbirths occur.

Through our established partnership with the National Health Commission, UNICEF has jointly launched the Safe Neonatal Project, to kick off the UNICEF-WHO Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP) as part of China's NHFPC-UNICEF supported National Child Survival Strategy (CSS).

The project focuses on expanding access to and improved quality implementation of maternal and newborn health services with particular attention to high-quality childbirth care for every newborn and the first day and week of life. A systematic approach is applied:

- Advocate and support the adaptation of ENAP and CSS as well as guidelines, standards and user-friendly toolkits on high impact interventions in pilot areas, used to inform national scaling up.
- Improve coverage of all high impact interventions by health insurance to remove financial barriers to access by the poorest households.
- Establish Centres of Excellence (CoE) to increase the skills of health providers to deliver high impact, quality health interventions needed for a healthy start in life.
- Ensure availability, access and use of skilled birth attendants and essential maternal and newborn commodities in a safe environment.

Lessons learnt from counties will be scaled up to reduce avoidable maternal, and newborn deaths across China and shared with Belt and Road countries in Africa and beyond.

For every mother and baby

The Safe Neonatal Project is being piloted across 18 counties in four western provinces, covering an estimated population of more than 4.5 million people with about 57,800 live births per year. Our approach is to ensure that every mother and newborn is provided with affordable, quality healthcare.

The project is working towards:

- Promoting the full implementation of the 24 high-impact essential interventions identified in CSS-specific pilot sites to reduce newborn preventable deaths, such as skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth, cord clamping and cutting after the first minutes after birth, early initiation of breastfeeding, kangaroo mother care (KMC) as well as special care for sick newborns.
- Ensuring availability, access and use of skilled birth attendants and essential maternal and newborn commodities in a safe environment.
- Encouraging mothers to access services and healthy household practices by sharing motivating messages and information through a Mother and Child Health booklet, a Healthy Family mobile phone application and local communication campaigns.

System changes saves lives

A cost effectiveness analysis estimates that China could prevent around 20,000 maternal and child deaths every year if it prioritizes and implements the intervention package across the country.

Results achieved

Significant progress has been achieved from the first two years of the Safe Neonatal Project.

- A baseline study was conducted and successfully influenced subnational and local government policy decision-making and informed the implementation of 18 county level child survival and development strategies.
- WHO's Early Essential Newborn Care guidelines and tools to support monitoring have been adapted and translated into Chinese, and shared more widely via publication in the Chinese Journal of Perinatal Medicine, one of China's most influential medical journals.

Providing quality care at birth yields a triple return on investment—saving mothers and newborns, and preventing stillbirths.

