



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Maternal and Child Health

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES MATTER

Years of research and experience have shown that preventative measures, early diagnosis and low-cost health interventions are critical for many health conditions, as well as for maternal and child health care. Since 1990, mortality rates among children have [decreased by 50%](#) and maternal deaths have [decreased by nearly 45%](#). These advances have been achieved largely using simple solutions and proven, inexpensive interventions to address leading causes of death, including diarrhea, pneumonia, malnutrition and complications during pregnancy and birth.

On the other hand, over [295,000 women](#) and [5 million children](#) die every year from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Children under 5 years old are most impacted—especially newborns, who die at significant rates. Maternal and child death rates are particularly high in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DAYS

Research shows that the [first 1,000 days of life](#) are foundational in developing a child's capacity to learn, grow and thrive for years to come. Ensuring that children receive adequate nutrition, vaccinations and other basic health interventions during this time period significantly decreases their mortality risk and their risk of developing serious health conditions later in life. [Poor nutrition for infants and toddlers](#) can cause irreversible damage to their growing brains; malnutrition is responsible for almost [half of all child deaths](#) worldwide. Since an infant's health is directly impacted by her mother's health during pregnancy, and because women most often continue to serve as the primary caregivers to children even after birth, effective investment in maternal health has direct, positive benefits to children's health.



The ELCA is working with fellow member churches of the Lutheran World Federation toward U.N. Sustainable Development Goals as part of the "Waking the Giant" initiative. SDG3 aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

ELCA GLOBAL MISSION

The ELCA Global Mission unit uses funds from ELCA World Hunger to support companion churches and partners around the world in their maternal and child health

Maternal and Child Health

activities. Direct activities comprise:

1. supporting hospital and clinic operations, which include regular checkups and emergency care for pregnant women and children;
2. community health efforts by, or in collaboration with, hospitals and clinics, including health education that stresses prenatal care, delivering at a clinic or hospital, and postnatal care for the mother and child; and
3. capacity building in maternal and child health care with new and existing health care workers.

Indirect activities supported by the ELCA include projects to improve nutrition and food security through new agricultural techniques, to increase income and to promote gender equality and female empowerment, all of which improve maternal and child health outcomes.

POLICY PRIORITY

The U.S. government has been leading global efforts to end preventable maternal and child deaths through bilateral and multilateral partnerships. These efforts include providing financial and technical assistance to low-income countries with high mortality rates for mothers and children under 5. In 2014, the [U.S. government declared](#) ending preventable child and maternal deaths around the world to be a national priority, which was a welcome call to action. The U.S. Agency for International Development is the lead government agency on this work. Moving forward, the ELCA Advocacy office will continue to advocate for funding resources and better maternal and child health policies.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[“Every child alive: The urgent need to end newborn deaths”](#) (United Nations Children’s Fund report, 2018)

[Maternal and child health](#) (USAID information, Updated: February 20, 2020)

FAST FACTS



MATERNAL HEALTH

When a mother dies in childbirth, her infant has only a **19% chance of surviving his or her first month.**



NEWBORN HEALTH

When interventions are delivered during labor and childbirth and immediate newborn care is provided, up to **51% of newborn deaths can be avoided.**



CHILD HEALTH

Diarrhea is one of the leading killers of children under-five, contributing to more deaths than HIV, malaria, and measles combined. An at-home treatment typically **costs less than \$.50.**



IMMUNIZATION

Immunization yields up to a **44-fold return on investment** in low- and middle-income countries and averts an estimated **2 to 3 million child deaths** each year.



WASH

Women and girls without access to toilets spend **97 billion hours** each year looking for a place to relieve themselves, translating into **97 billion hours of lost productivity.**

FAST FACTS shared from [USAID.gov](#)
Maternal and Child Health
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