

Nutrition at the World Food Programme

Maternal Nutrition

Integrating Nutrition into Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

At the Every Woman, Every Child: Within Arms' Reach meeting spearheaded by the Canadian government in May 2014, global leaders working in Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) recognised for the first time that nutrition interventions are an important component of integrated services for mothers and children. This is something that the World Food Programme is of critical importance. However health systems are already burdened and implementers in this field may not be equipped to improve the nutrition of these vulnerable groups, such as by providing specialized nutritious foods to treat or prevent malnutrition. This is especially true in crisis contexts, where more than half of maternal and child deaths occur worldwide. Reaching women and children with lifesaving services, including nutrition interventions, in food-insecure contexts requires linking health and food systems, and experience in working in difficult contexts and in close collaboration with governments.

To address these challenges, WFP is now working to integrate nutrition within reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) platforms such as the H4+ partnership (joint effort by United Nations and related agencies and programmes, including UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UN Women, WHO, and the World Bank) to bring down maternal



mortality rates and increase child survival rates. This work includes development of stronger, more integrated policies for RMNCH, increasing its priority within national governments, strengthening health systems (capacity, reach, service quality), as well as greater engagement of communities to identify and solve health and nutrition problems.

WFP's ongoing efforts to treat and prevent acute malnutrition in pregnant women and nursing women (3-4 million women are reached



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annually) are enhanced by stronger links with the health sector during pregnancy and breastfeeding. For example, combining food support for pregnant women with good antenatal and obstetric care can reduce mortality as well as improve nutrition outcomes for women and their children. The complementarity of health and food interventions can also lead to increased scale, coverage and participation in maternal and antenatal care programmes. At the same time, the work through this partnership will also contribute to reducing stunting, in line with the Zero Hunger Challenge and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Health highlighted the importance of good nutrition prior to conception and during pregnancy.

Strategies to ensure good nutrition during the critical 1,000-day window of opportunity, from conception to age two, are the first line of prevention against undernutrition. Prioritising nutrition support in the third trimester of pregnancy is proven to reduce the likelihood that mothers will give birth to babies who are small for their gestational age and/or low birth weight. In turn, this will reduce babies' risk of morbidity, mortality and becoming stunted during their first years of life. WFP's emphasis on providing adequate nutrition to mothers before and after delivery, and while breastfeeding, helps newborn babies survive and thrive. WFP recognizes that partnerships are critical to achieve these important health and nutrition outcomes.



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