



Urgent Need for Increased Global Access to Effective Prevention and Treatment of Pneumonia

Forum of International Respiratory Societies Highlights World Pneumonia Day 2023

On World Pneumonia Day, 12 November, the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), of which Pan African Thoracic Society is a founding member, is highlighting the urgent challenges in pneumonia prevention and treatment globally.

In 2021, an estimated 6 million people died from respiratory infections, predominantly pneumonia including COVID-19, according to the Global Burden of Disease.ⁱ Pneumonia is the leading cause of death in young children. Over 650,000 children under five die from pneumonia each year - especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Pneumonia is also a major cause of deaths among the elderly. However, pneumonia can be prevented and treated.

There are several effective preventive strategies for pneumonia, including: good nutrition, prevention of HIV, hand washing, reducing exposure to indoor and outdoor air pollution, and effective vaccines. New vaccines have recently been developed to prevent respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), the most common cause of pneumonia in infants and a frequent cause in the elderly. However, global access and affordability of these vaccines is needed. Treating pneumonia requires access to effective antibiotics and oxygen, but this too is still suboptimal in many LMICs.

With effective preventive and treatment strategies, dramatic reductions in mortality and improved childhood survival, as outlined in [Sustainable Development Goal 3.2](#), should be possible.

Despite many efforts, there are still barriers to ensuring that everyone has access to the care they need. These include:

- Lack of affordable life-saving vaccines, including new vaccines against RSV in addition to currently available vaccines against influenza virus, COVID-19, and *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.
- Low awareness about pneumonia, its risk factors, and interventions for prevention of pneumonia deaths.
- Limited health care system capacity to diagnose and treat pneumonia with effective therapy including oxygen and antibiotics.
- Lack of funding: Pneumonia research and services do not have adequate funding, hindering progress in medical advancements and implementation of pneumonia management.

On World Pneumonia Day, FIRS calls on governments and other stakeholders to take urgent action to tackle pneumonia by:

1. Strengthening health systems capacity.
2. Ensuring that all children and vulnerable adults receive effective pneumonia vaccines.ⁱⁱ

3. Reducing air pollution and exposure to air pollutants and promoting good nutrition, hygiene practices, and smoking cessation to reduce the risk of pneumonia.
4. Raising awareness and knowledge about pneumonia prevention and treatment.
5. Improving access to antibiotics, pulse oximetry and oxygen therapy.
6. Encouraging funders to invest in pneumonia research and services and supporting research to implement pneumonia prevention and treatment interventions.

FIRS member Pan African Thoracic Society representative Prof Heather Zar said: "Strengthening preventive and treatment interventions to ensure **everyone** has access to these effective interventions is crucial to reduce deaths and illness from pneumonia. New vaccines must be available and affordable globally."

FIRS President Dr David CL Lam added: "An effective vaccination strategy will reduce the spread of pneumonia, and its impact on the population. Equal access to treatment, namely appropriate antibiotics, is especially important. Appropriate use of antibiotics would offer a more effective treatment strategy and reduce the emergence of drug resistance."

"Because action on pneumonia is essential for reaching the Sustainable Development Goals - especially the goal to end preventable deaths of children under five - and for effective pandemic preparedness and response, we must step up our efforts."

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Pneumonia

- Pneumonia can be caused by viruses, bacteria, or fungi, but it is often preventable through vaccination, adequate nutrition (including breastfeeding) and improving socioeconomic conditions.
- Environmental factors can also increase the risk of pneumonia including indoor air pollution from biomass fuels, secondhand smoke and overcrowding.

For more pneumonia resources, visit [Pan African Thoracic Society](#) aims to promote lung health in Africa, the continent most afflicted by morbidity and death from respiratory diseases, by promoting education, research, advocacy, optimal care and the development of African capacity to address respiratory challenges in the continent.

The Global Impact of Respiratory Disease report outlines major causes of respiratory disease and lays out recommendations for global action.

About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is an organization comprised of the world's leading international respiratory societies working together to improve lung health globally. The goal of FIRS is to unify and enhance efforts to improve lung health through the combined work of its more than 70,000 members globally.

FIRS comprises the American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), the Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR), Asociación Latino Americana De Tórax (ALAT),

European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (The Union), Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS), the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), and the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD).

ⁱ [Global Burden of Disease, 2019](#) and [WHO COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

ⁱⁱ Stop Pneumonia/ Every Breath Counts Child Survival Statement 2022 <https://stoppneumonia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/EBCCChildSurvivalCampaignStatement20July2022.pdf>

