

Saving the Lives of 3 Million

Photo by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

In many communities around the world, children are not named until they survive their first month of life – the neonatal, or newborn, period. The first 28 days of a baby’s life should be a time of joy, yet the first month, especially birth and the days thereafter, carries the highest risk of death for both mothers and their newborns. Globally, 3 million newborns die each year, and 2.6 million babies are stillborn.^{1,2} Four out of five newborn deaths — nearly 80% of the total burden — result from three preventable and treatable conditions: preterm birth, infections, and complications during childbirth.³

The pace of progress toward Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4 for child survival is accelerating as the 2015 target draws nearer. Across the world, more newborns are surviving their first month of life than even five years ago, but a lack of political attention and resources continue to contribute to the slow progress in saving newborn lives.⁴ While newborn deaths have decreased from 4.4 million in 1990 to 2.9 million in 2011, this decline is a third slower than for under-five deaths after the first month of life. As a result, the proportion of under-five deaths happening in the first four weeks of life has increased – today newborns account for 43% of deaths among all children under-five – up from 36% in 1990.³

Since 2000, major advances in the evidence base for newborn survival have enabled countries to pave the way for impact at large scale, showing that rapid change is possible. Thanks to joint efforts by multiple national and global stakeholders, we have begun to bend the curve for newborn survival. Trends showing progress, lessons learned, and success stories are evidence that efforts to save newborn lives have been effective, and we must ensure that this momentum continues.

Newborn survival must become a global priority.

- * Among all children, newborns have the highest risk of death.
- * Three preventable and treatable conditions account for the majority of these deaths: prematurity, infections, and complications during birth.
- * There is substantial evidence that two-thirds of newborn deaths can be prevented if mothers and newborns receive low-cost, low-tech care delivered through strengthened health systems. Improved practices at home can save many more.

The Saving Newborn Lives Program

Save the Children's Saving Newborn Lives (SNL) program, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a globally-recognized leader in newborn health and a respected voice in countries. Since 2000, SNL has worked to reach the world's most vulnerable newborns and help them survive their first month of life.



Photo by Tracy Geoghegan / Save the Children

SNL seeks to achieve equitable and effective coverage of high-impact newborn services and practices institutionalized at scale. By working with governments and partners to put newborn health on global and national agendas the SNL program serves as a catalyst for action.

To accomplish its goals, the program works to develop, apply, document, and sustain packages of effective evidence-based newborn care services and practices at scale. In addition, the program advocates to increase availability of and access to routine and emergency newborn care services and supplies, to improve the quality of newborn care services, and to increase knowledge about and demand for newborn care.



Photo by Raj Yagnik/Save the Children

Securing Results: The SNL Approach

Ensuring that quality programs reach mothers and newborns requires commitments and actions by multiple partners at national, regional and global levels.

Working alongside valued partners, ministries of health, and national stakeholders, SNL provides technical leadership, advocacy, and measurement support. The program works to maintain a cycle of evidence generation, consensus building, policy formulation and guidance, and program implementation and learning.

Accountability, Results, and Partnerships

Improving accountability, measuring results, and encouraging partnerships are key to achieving SNL's goals. In all three areas over the last decade, SNL and partners have helped to put the right foundations into place to ensure the implementation of effective newborn health interventions at scale.

Advocating for and fostering environments with favorable policies, programs and systems. SNL helps build consensus on technical issues; translates and disseminates data and evidence; and uses epidemiological, evaluation, and cost data for national decision-making.

Facilitating the generation of evidence around newborn health. SNL applies country engagement strategies and technical strength to answer “how-to” questions about enhancing program effectiveness and coverage at scale.

Leveraging sustainable change in health systems. SNL ensures implementation of evidence-based newborn care; improves technical leadership; and facilitates the integration of newborn care into national health plans and budgets, job descriptions,

provider trainings and curricula, behavior change communications, guidelines for supervision, quality assurance practices, and criteria for monitoring.

Tracking progress and outcomes of newborn health policies and programs to promote accountability and action. SNL develops, tests, and integrates standardized newborn metrics and methodologies to assess and monitor capacity for and effectiveness of essential newborn health service implementation.

Forming and working through partnerships to build consensus around taking actions for newborns. SNL reinforces these partnerships through the identification and development of champions who interact with governments, stakeholders, national donors, and communities.



Photo by the EveryOne Campaign/Save the Children

Global and National Impact

Efforts to improve newborn health are working. The increased focus provided by SNL and partners since 2000 has contributed to remarkable progress for newborns in high-burden countries.

Improving understanding of the causes and burden of newborn mortality and what works to save newborn lives. SNL has become a global leader in providing research on newborn health, including annual estimates of neonatal mortality rates and causes of newborn death, and has made progress in developing and achieving consensus on indicators to measure coverage of newborn care.

In 2005 SNL co-led a neonatal series in *The Lancet*. The landmark publication captured international attention for newborn survival, providing data on the numbers and causes of newborn death. The series shed light on previously undocumented and poorly-understood areas of newborn mortality and delineated ways for countries to incorporate newborn care into existing systems.⁵

SNL took a lead role in developing the unprecedented, country-cleared UN estimates of stillbirth rates, as published by *The Lancet* in the 2011 Stillbirth Series.² The series presented in detail the causes and global burden of stillbirths; provided a framework to deliver solutions within the context of reproductive, maternal, and child health and nutrition programs; and included a rallying cry for collective action.

In 2012, SNL co-led the groundbreaking *Born Too Soon: Global Action Report on Preterm Birth*, identifying preterm birth as the leading cause of newborn deaths and the second-leading cause of deaths among children under five

years of age.⁶ *Born Too Soon* published the first country ranking of preterm birth rates and reinvigorated commitments from governments and stakeholders to address newborn survival by focusing on preterm birth prevention and improvement of care for preterm babies.

Through the findings of over 60 research studies, SNL has contributed to global guidelines and standards for specific interventions including newborn care packages, and practical ways to strengthen the continuum of care for mothers, newborns, and children. The program has also helped determine effective delivery mechanisms within existing systems that can deliver impact at scale.

Building awareness and mobilizing action for newborn health. SNL has mobilized action at both global and country levels by promoting key messages about newborn health and fostering widespread discussion about critical aspects of newborn survival.

SNL has contributed to the publication and dissemination of over 250 peer-reviewed publications and over 150 technical and policy briefs, training manuals, guidelines, and books to increase awareness, build the knowledge base, and promote improvements in newborn health.

SNL has worked with governments and partners to document the state of newborn health in several countries, building national momentum and setting the stage for informed action. In countries across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South Asia, situa-

tional analyses have reviewed the epidemiological and social aspects of newborn health, provision of care, and the policy and donor situation.

In 2010, SNL launched the Healthy Newborn Network (HNN), the first online community dedicated to improving newborn health around the world. The network brings together newborn health stakeholders, promotes partnerships, and provides access to information about key newborn health issues. HNN facilitates access to data, key resources, and lessons learned from countries and partners working for improved newborn survival.

Building partnerships and securing leadership for newborn health. SNL has been instrumental in creating and maintaining global- and country-level partnerships, through which stakeholders become important newborn health advocates who build consensus around joint actions.

At a global level, SNL plays key roles in global technical working groups that address the implementation and measurement of newborn care programs. SNL helped create the Healthy Newborn Partnership and supported its merger into the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) in 2005.

At the country level, SNL helps establish and facilitate newborn health committees and task forces that include donors, ministry of health officials, professional organizations, and in-country partners to bring about changes in policy or strategies.

Improving accountability for and influencing newborn policies, guidelines, and large-scale programs. SNL provides capacity building and technical assistance to governments and in-country partners to track the implementation and effects of their efforts in newborn care and inform program planning.

SNL has helped to integrate newborn health indicators into country-level health information systems and into standard household survey instruments.

In 2009, SNL developed “readiness” benchmarks for scale-up progress to measure the degree to which country health systems are prepared to deliver newborn care interventions. They measure availability of evidence, consensus building, financing, standards and guidelines, and implementation. Several countries have used the benchmarks to make decisions about technical inputs needed to improve their newborn health programs.

SNL has convened global partnerships and built global consensus around critical interventions, such as in the WHO/UNICEF Joint Statement on *Home Visits for the Newborn Child*,⁷ which has been used to change policies in several countries and regions and influence how programs and services are delivered.



Photo by Pep Bonet/Save the Children

“Proven solutions—such as low-cost treatment for infection and teaching moms to wrap their premature babies skin-to-skin to keep them warm and encourage breastfeeding—could save millions of lives a year. We already have the cost-effective tools to save these lives. Now we must deliver them.”

- Carolyn Miles, President & CEO
Save the Children

Continued Action and the Way Forward

2013 is a critical year to accelerate progress for newborn health. SNL continues to advocate for a Global Newborn Action Plan that calls for increased commitment, investment, and progress for improved newborn survival.

Since its launch in 2000, SNL and partners have contributed to inspiring progress. High-impact interventions now exist to reduce the 3 million annual deaths, and many can be taken to scale. Focusing on newborn survival is integral to achieving the Millennium Development Goals for maternal and child survival and addressing preventable child deaths beyond 2015. Integrated approaches and linkages to existing reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health initiatives provide an important opportunity for impact.



Photo by Shafiqul Alam Kiron/Save the Children

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