



Covid-19 and Children: UNICEF

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Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Children's Fund** (UNICEF) has released the report “**Averting a lost Covid generation**”, which highlights significant and growing consequences of **Covid-19** on children.

The report came ahead of the **World Children's Day** (20th November).

Key Points

- **About the Report:**

- It is the **first UNICEF report to comprehensively outline** the dire and growing **consequences for children as the pandemic goes on.**
- It shows that while symptoms among infected children remain mild, **infections are rising** and the longer-term **impact on the education, nutrition and well-being of an entire generation** of children and young people can be life-altering.

- **Data Analysis:**

- Children and adolescents account for **1 in 9 reported Covid-19 infections.**
- As of the **beginning of November 2020**, children and adolescents accounted for **11% of the 25.7 million infections** reported across 87 countries.
- It estimated that **a third of the countries** analysed, **witnessed a drop of at least 10% in coverage of health services** and there was a **40% decline in the coverage of nutrition services** for women and children across 135 countries.
- As of **October 2020**, **265 million children were still missing out on school meals** globally.
- **65 countries** reported a **decrease in-home visits by social workers** in September 2020, compared to 2019.

- **Concerns:**

- These numbers **bust the myth that children are barely affected** by the disease, which has been prevalent throughout the pandemic.
- **Disruptions to key services** and **soaring poverty rates** pose the biggest threat to children and the longer the crisis persists, the deeper its impact on children's education, health, nutrition and well-being.
- **Vulnerabilities of women and children have increased**, as **health services continue to be disrupted and schools shut, denying children free mid-day meals** offered at schools for underprivileged children.
- While children could **transmit the virus to each other and to older age groups**, there was strong evidence that, with **basic safety measures in place**, the net benefits of keeping schools open outweighed the costs of closing them.

Schools are not the main driver of community transmission, and children are more likely to get the virus outside of school settings.

- **India Specific Highlights:**

- **Infections in Under 20:**

As per data from the **Indian Council of Medical Research** (ICMR) on the dashboard of the **National Centre for Disease Control**, 11.89% of Covid-19 cases in India are in under 20.

- **Education:**

1.5 million school closures have impacted 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary education and **28 million** children who were attending pre-school education **in Anganwadi Centres**.

- **Nutrition:**

- An estimated **20 million children under 5** years of age are suffering from **wasting** (low weight for height), over **40 million** children are **chronically malnourished** and more than half of the Indian **women aged 15-49** years are **anaemic**.
- The pandemic has **further exposed the fragility** of children, less by the virus itself but much more by the indirect and long-term fallout.

- **Newborn Mortality:**

Covid-19 poses a grave threat to the gains made by India in the **Neonatal Mortality Rate** (NMR) and **Infant Mortality Rate** (IMR) which saw improvements in recent years.

- **NMR** is defined as the ‘number of deaths during the first 28 completed days of life per 1,000 live births in a given year or period’.
- **IMR** is defined as the ‘number of deaths of children under the age of 1 year per 1000 live births for a given year.’

- **Sanitation:**

- The **socio-economic stress and migration** resulting due to the Covid-19 put **access to toilets and the practice of using them at risk**.
- The schools which offered **improved access to and quality of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are closed** and the facilities are not accessed.

- **Recommendations:**

- Ensure all children **learn**, including by closing the **digital divide**.
- Guarantee access to **nutrition** and **health services** and make **vaccines** affordable and available to every child.
- Support and protect the **mental health** of children and young people and bring an end to abuse, gender-based violence and neglect in childhood.
- Increase access to **safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene** and address **environmental degradation** and **climate change**.
- Reverse the rise in **child poverty** and ensure an inclusive recovery for all.
- Redouble efforts to protect and support children and their families living through **conflict, disaster and displacement**.

World Children's Day

- It is celebrated on **20th November each year to promote international togetherness and awareness** among children worldwide, and **improve children's welfare**.
- The date of 20th November is an important date because, on this date, the **United Nations General Assembly** adopted the **Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959** and the **Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989**.
 - Convention on the Rights of the Child **recognises every human being under 18 years old as a child** and is the **world's most widely ratified human rights treaty**.
 - **India ratified it in 1992**.

Source: TH