

Environmental Health

USAID Global Health

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Bad air and water can cause ill health and death, especially among young children. In countries already struggling with poverty, infectious diseases, and war and conflict, the toll from polluted air and water adds greatly to the national burden.

Acute respiratory infections, primarily pneumonia, are leading causes of death among children under age 5 and are closely associated with exposure to indoor smoke from cooking with biomass fuels. Nearly 1.6 million children under age 5 died in 2007 from di-

arrheal diseases caused by unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation. Millions more were exposed to waterborne infections, such as cholera, typhoid fever, and dysentery. The spread of malaria, which results in about 2.5 million deaths annually, is worsened by poor environmental conditions. Water shortages and poor water management can lead to increases in malnutrition and disease, loss of biodiversity and agricultural production, reduced economic growth, and social instability.

Safe water and proper sanitation are great concerns for impoverished populations, for areas with heavy migration, and in the wake of disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes. Improving hygiene can markedly reduce the number of infections, parasites, and insults to immune systems. USAID focuses on such simple interventions as changing hygiene behavior by promoting handwashing with soap, proper storage and treatment of water, and safe disposal of feces.

Each activity alone can reduce the prevalence of diarrheal disease by as much as 30 percent. Household water treatment and safe storage reduce waterborne disease, empower families and communities, and improve productivity. These measures compliment community and municipal

water supply infrastructure programs by providing immediate access to safe water while construction of improved treatment facilities is planned or implemented.

Additionally, USAID supports other health interventions that address not only environmental issues, but also focus directly on individual treatments. To deal with air quality, the Agency and its partners have created initiatives to reduce vehicle pollutants, launch retrofit technologies, encourage use of cleaner fuels, and support other science-based urban air pollution strategies and management.

Rehydration therapy and treatment with zinc through USAID-sponsored projects reduce the severity and duration of diarrhea. The loss of these nutrients, along with dehydration and weight reduction, are the primary dangers of diarrhea. Broad outreach and information campaigns, which are designed to educate thousands of health care providers and families on proper techniques and best practices, are undertaken to help spread the word about the availability and utility of these and other lifesaving treatments.

USAID considers the preservation and improvement of the environment to be a top priority of its global health program. Its environmental protection interventions help struggling nations establish self-sustaining programs of their own and improve the lives of millions throughout the world.

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Web site

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/eh/index.html

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