

## COVID 19 DEATHS OF SOUTH ASIAN CHILDREN

### Pandemic measures indirectly killed over a quarter million South Asian children, says UN report

*The full effect of the pandemic lockdowns is just starting to become clear as countries take stock of their public health programmes.*



**A volunteer hands out free face masks to children in Lalitpur, Nepal. Side effects of Covid-19 lockdowns in the country include an 80% drop in the number of young children treated for severe acute malnutrition, a new UN report says. Photo: AP**

The investigation focused on South Asia's six most populous countries: Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, together home to nearly two billion people. The report, commissioned by Unicef and supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), cites examples of the more severe service disruptions and their tragic results.

"Direct and Indirect Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic and Response in South Asia" found that women, children and adolescents were the worst-hit.

Lockdown side effects include an 80% drop in the number of young children treated for severe acute malnutrition in Nepal and Bangladesh, and a sharp drop in childhood immunisations in Pakistan and India.

"The fall-off of these critical services has had a devastating impact on the health and nutrition of the poorest families," said Unicef regional director for South Asia George Laryea-Adjei.

"It is absolutely vital that these services are fully restored for children and mothers who are in desperate need of them, and that everything possible is done to ensure that people feel safe to use them."

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South Asia has reported nearly 13 million Covid cases and nearly 200,000 deaths so far, says Reliefweb International.

Many countries, including those in South Asia, responded to the pandemic with stringent lockdowns in which hospitals, pharmacies and grocers remained open, but almost everything else shut down. The report examines the effect of these government strategies on healthcare, social services, including schools, and the economy.

It estimates that there have been 228,000 additional deaths of children under five in the six countries due to crucial services, ranging from nutrition benefits to immunisation, being halted.

It also estimates that there have been some 3.5 million additional unwanted pregnancies, including 400,000 among teenagers, due to poor or no access to contraception.

The full effect of the pandemic and lockdowns is just starting to become clear as countries take stock of their public health and education programmes.

Experts in India already fear that malnutrition rates will be significantly worse across the country when the statistics are totted up over the next few months.

The interruption to health services also affected those suffering from other diseases – the report predicts an additional 6,000 deaths across the region among adolescents who couldn't get treated for tuberculosis, malaria, typhoid and HIV/Aids. **-Reliefweb International/malaysianow.com, March 17, 2021**

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