

Primary Health

Preventing Impairment and Disability

FACT SHEET

Part of the CBM Prevention Toolkit
on “How to Improve the Health and
Development of your Child”

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How to Improve the Health and Development of your Child: Preventing Impairment and Disability

- The CBR matrix identifies *promotion* and *prevention* as important components of the health domain.
- It is recognized that many impairments which can lead to disability can be prevented or improved by primary health practices.
- The WHO, UNICEF and other international agencies encourage primary health care to prevent disease and disability.
- The primary health toolkit assists CBM partners to develop and integrate prevention of disability activities with community primary health resources. We put the emphasis on *prevention of impairment and disability* within existing disease prevention programs developed by the WHO and UNICEF.

The reference we follow is ***Facts for Life***, a well-respected publication and program of UNICEF/WHO.

Appropriate modules have been adapted to highlight prevention of disability in children. These include:

- Safe motherhood and Timing of Births
- Breastfeeding
- Child Nutrition & Growth
- Preventing Bone Deformities
- Hygiene
- Early development and learning
- Malaria prevention
- Infection prevention
- Burn prevention
- Injury prevention and household safety

Some of the principles outlined in this prevention toolkit include:

1. Safe motherhood and timing of births

- results in healthier babies with a better start on life and lower risk of infections and other neonatal diseases
- reduces the risk of obstetric complications, including vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF)
- Reduces prematurity which is a common cause of cerebral palsy
- Maternal rubella vaccination, iodine intake and folate supplementation reduces the risk of serious birth impairments

2. Breastfeeding

- Improves the nutrition of babies and enhances their immune system, reducing the risk of infections
- Babies are vulnerable to infections which can cause visual impairment (ophthalmia neonatorum), middle ear infections which cause hearing impairment, central nervous system infections which cause epilepsy, cerebral palsy or cognitive impairment, and joint infections which cause physical impairment.

3. Child Nutrition & Growth

- Malnutrition results in physical stunting, delayed development and cognitive impairment
- Lack of Vitamin A results in childhood visual impairment.
- Lack of Vitamin D results in soft, deformed bones.
- Immunizations reduce the risk of impairment from rubella and measles (deafness and blindness), polio, and some infections that cause central nervous system damage such as hydrocephalus and cerebral palsy.

4. Preventing Bone Deformities

- Lack of calcium and Vitamin D in the diet results in soft, deformed bones.
- Dietary deficiency in calcium is a little known problem yet results in a very high rate of physical impairment in children from angulatory bone deformities.
- This module emphasizes foods rich in calcium.

5. Hygiene

- Good hygiene prevents the transmission of infectious diseases
- Hand and face hygiene prevents trachoma (SAFE advocacy)

6. Early development and learning

- Stimulation and learning helps all and is particularly important for children with disabilities

7. Malaria prevention

- Malaria is not only a major killer of children but often results in significant long-term impairment including epilepsy, visual and hearing impairment, cerebral palsy and cognitive impairment.
- Malaria results in anemia which increases the risk of childhood and maternal infections and other diseases. Anemia increases the risk of premature birth and cerebral palsy.

8. Infection prevention

- Many of the above interventions help prevent the ravages of infections.
- The key to infection prevention is early identification and treatment

- Safe injection practice reduces the risk of disability from transmissible diseases like HIV and Hepatitis
- Many children in low-income countries develop sciatic nerve paralysis and muscle fibrosis from inappropriate and poorly done injections. This module advises parents to get injections only if absolutely necessary, on prescription from a doctor, and in a credible medical facility

9. Burn prevention

- Burns most commonly affect small children and cause serious physical impairment
- Studies have shown how few children access medical care for burns in low-income countries and therefore develop permanent joint contractures.
- This module advocates putting barriers around cooking fires and extinguishing candles at bedtime, amongst other safety measures. It also advocates for early medical intervention.

10. Injury prevention and household safety

- Household safety includes protection from sharp objects, medicines and chemicals
- Road safety is advocated

Education in primary health practices can be implemented by community rehabilitation workers in CBM partner projects when interacting with caregiver and community groups.

CBR workers can also network and advocate for the use of these materials by existing primary health personnel in their working areas.

Wherever disability advocacy is being done, prevention training should be included.