

**News Release – Strictly Embargoed until 28 October 2021**

## **Combining vaccines with nutrition a game-changer against COVID-19 and future pandemics say Gavi and SUN**

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- Malnutrition and infectious diseases together cause millions of preventable child deaths every year and contribute to a vicious cycle of poor health, stunted growth, poverty and exclusion.
  - Rolling out immunisation and nutrition programmes together significantly increases the number of people reached and reduces delivery costs.
  - Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement have now partnered to launch this innovative two-pronged healthcare approach.
  - This approach is a game-changer in supporting communities to be resilient to future pandemics, especially for vulnerable people, women, and children.
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**Geneva, 28 October 2021** – Delivering immunisation and nutrition programmes together is necessary to maximise results and minimise costs of these critical health services, enabling more people to be reached, especially in vulnerable communities. This is the conclusion of a new policy brief launched today and co-authored by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement – global leaders in immunisation and nutrition respectively.

The policy brief, *Equity from birth: an integrated approach to immunisation and nutrition*, highlights that malnutrition and infectious diseases together cause millions of preventable child deaths every year and contribute to a vicious cycle of poor health, stunted growth, poverty and exclusion; while malnutrition – both undernourished and overweight – can severely decrease our COVID-19 survival rate.

In advance of the 7-8 December Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G), being held in Tokyo, Gavi and SUN are calling on global leaders and key decision-makers in all countries to take action and prioritise this two-pronged vaccine-nutrition approach, through clear commitment making.

They are also calling on relevant international health partners to take action to advance the integration of immunisation and nutrition, and to develop clear recommendations governments can use to roll out this urgently needed approach.

“Delivering immunisation and nutrition services together will ensure that more people can be reached, especially the vulnerable, women, and children – and contribute to building communities that are resilient to COVID-19 and future pandemics. Countries must be enabled to advance smart joint packages of support on the ground, where it matters the most,” said Gerda Verburg, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and SUN Movement Coordinator.

The policy brief highlights that by 2022 alone, the COVID-19 pandemic could result in an additional 2.6 million children suffering from stunting and 9.3 million suffering from wasting. In 2020, the COVID-19

pandemic and associated disruptions on health systems resulted in 22.7 million children missing out on vaccinations – 3.7 million more than in 2019 and the highest number since 2009.

“By integrating immunisation and nutrition efforts, and allowing vaccines and good nutrition to be delivered together we can ensure we reach the most vulnerable populations – effectively and efficiently, to help enhance equity across the world,” said Anuradha Gupta, Gavi Deputy Chief Executive Officer.

The policy brief also recommends that national governments and international health partners are proactive about combining immunization and nutrition interventions and other essential health services, including through sharing infrastructure and value chains.

“It takes a great deal of effort for health workers to reach the most vulnerable children during immunisation campaigns. If they could use the opportunity to also screen for malnutrition or provide vitamin A supplementation or therapeutic foods for example, they could make a big difference in children’s lives,” said Dr. Githinji Gitahi, Group CEO, Amref Health Africa.

The N4G Summit comes at a critical time, midway through the United Nations (UN) Decade of Action on Nutrition, with only five years left to achieve the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets on maternal, infant and young child nutrition, and with just ten years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Given this, and the serious disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the policy brief underscores, now is the time to invest better and smarter, as countries gradually find ways to restore, maintain and strengthen immunisation, nutrition, and other essential services.

“If we are to live up to the SDG principle of ‘leaving no one behind’”, the policy brief’s executive summary concludes, “we must start by identifying and reaching disadvantaged and excluded groups with the most essential interventions”.

**Read policy brief:** [English](#) | [Français](#) | [Español](#)

**Read executive summary:** [English](#) | [Français](#) | [Español](#)

**Read joint statement/collaboration plan PDF (embargoed until 28 October):** <https://bit.ly/3mdK4f6>

**Watch Gerda Verburg video statement on partnership video (embargoed until 28 October):**  
<https://youtu.be/JFuPzoHDhj0>

## **Media Contacts**

Jennifer Ferguson-Mitchell, Communications Specialist, SUN Secretariat, [Jennifer.ferguson-mitchell@scalingupnutrition.org](mailto:Jennifer.ferguson-mitchell@scalingupnutrition.org), +41 79 481 88 03.

Cirũ Kariũki, Media Relations at Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, [ckariuki@gavi.org](mailto:ckariuki@gavi.org), +41 79 913 94 41

## Key Data

- Routine immunisation and improved nutrition have played a critical role in reducing child under-five mortality by 67% over the last 30 years.<sup>1</sup>
- Malnutrition remains an underlying cause for 50% of the 3.1 million child deaths each year.<sup>2</sup>
- Immunisation prevents 2-3 million deaths each year from diseases including diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, influenza and measles.<sup>3</sup>
- At least 1.5 million people still die from vaccine-preventable diseases each year.<sup>4</sup>
- One dollar invested in nutrition provides a US\$16 rate of return.<sup>5</sup>
- One dollar invested in immunisation in GAVI-supported countries provides a US\$21 rate of return.<sup>6</sup>
- Nearly 20 million infants have insufficient access to vaccines each year.<sup>7</sup>
- Undernutrition rates among children remain unacceptably high – with 149.2 million children under five years suffering from stunting and 45.4 million children suffering from wasting.<sup>8</sup>
- By 2022 alone, the COVID-19 pandemic could result in an additional 2.6 million children suffering from stunting and 9.3 million suffering from wasting.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated disruptions on health systems resulted in 22.7 million children missing out on vaccinations – 3.7 million more than in 2019 and the highest number since 2009.<sup>10</sup>
- In 2020, the number of children who have received no routine vaccines, “zero-dose” children increased from 13.6 million to 17.1 million.<sup>11</sup>
- Malnutrition and infectious diseases are mutually negatively reinforcing. Acutely malnourished children are 2.5 to 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia<sup>12</sup>, and up to 8 times more likely to die of diarrhoea – with repeated bouts of diarrhoea associated with up to 43% of child stunting cases.
- Influenza vaccines for mothers led to a 15% reduction in low birthweight.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [UNICEF child mortality rates.](#)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF. 2021. [Malnutrition.](#)

<sup>3</sup> WHO. 2021. [Vaccines and Immunization.](#)

<sup>4</sup> WHO. 2019. [Immunization.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Global Nutrition Report. 2017. [2017 Global Nutrition Report: Nourishing the SDGs.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. 2020. [Immunization Programs Yield High “Return on Investment,” Saving Hundreds of Billions of Dollars.](#)

<sup>7</sup> WHO. 2021. [Vaccines and Immunization.](#)

<sup>8</sup> FAO. 2021. [State of Food insecurity 2021](#)

<sup>9</sup> Headey D., Heidkamp R., et al. 2020. [Impacts of COVID-19 on childhood malnutrition and nutrition-related mortality.](#)

<sup>10</sup> WHO/UNICEF. 2021. [Progress and Challenges Sustaining and Advancing Immunization Coverage During the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Chisti M.J., Tebruegge M., et al. 2009. [Pneumonia in severely malnourished children in developing countries – mortality risk, aetiology and validity of WHO clinical signs: a systematic review.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Steinhoff M.C., Omer S.B., et al. 2009. [Association of infant pneumococcal immunization with infant growth in Asia.](#)

## **About the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement**

Since 2010, the SUN Movement has inspired a new way of working collaboratively to end malnutrition, in all its forms. With the governments of 64 SUN Countries and Indian States in the lead, it unites more than 3,000 civil society organisations, 16 United Nations agencies and more than 900 small- and medium-sized enterprises to advance achievement of global nutrition goals, and to put national priorities at the heart of global efforts to improve nutrition.

Learn more at [scalingupnutrition.org](http://scalingupnutrition.org) and connect with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

## **About Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance**

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance is a public-private partnership that helps vaccinate half the world's children against some of the world's deadliest diseases. Since its inception in 2000, Gavi has helped to immunise a whole generation – over 888 million children – and prevented more than 15 million future deaths, helping to halve child mortality in 73 lower-income countries. Gavi also plays a key role in improving global health security by supporting health systems as well as funding global stockpiles for Ebola, cholera, meningitis and yellow fever vaccines. After two decades of progress, Gavi is now focused on protecting the next generation and reaching the unvaccinated children still being left behind, employing innovative finance and the latest technology – from drones to biometrics – to save millions more lives, prevent outbreaks before they can spread and help countries on the road to self-sufficiency. Learn more at [www.gavi.org](http://www.gavi.org) and connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Gavi is a co-convenor of COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, together with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the World Health Organization (WHO). In its role Gavi is focused on procurement and delivery for COVAX: coordinating the design, implementation and administration of the COVAX Facility and the Gavi COVAX AMC and working with its Alliance partners UNICEF and WHO, along with governments, on country readiness and delivery.

The Vaccine Alliance brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry, technical agencies, civil society, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private sector partners. View the full list of donor governments and other leading organizations that fund Gavi's work [here](#).