



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

# The importance of prevention in the fight to end child wasting

## WHAT IS WASTING?

Child wasting is a life-threatening condition caused by insufficient consumption of nutritious foods, poor nutrient absorption, or frequent or prolonged illness. Affected children are dangerously thin, with weakened immunity and a higher risk of dying.

Globally, wasting is the underlying cause in almost half of all deaths among children under 5. Children suffering from moderate wasting are three times, and those with severe wasting between nine and 12 times, more likely to die than a well-nourished child.

While wasting can be treated, even just one episode impairs physiological and cognitive growth, blighting the development of children, their communities, and entire nations.

## STATE OF WASTING IN THE WORLD

In 2022, wasting threatened the lives of 45 million children around the world. In Yemen, almost half of all children under 5 — or roughly 2.2 million children — face wasting; in Sudan, 3 million children under 5 currently suffer from wasting; and in Pakistan, one in five children under 5 is affected. Conflict, climate change, the global food crisis and the unaffordability of nutritious diets are aggravating and worsening an already critical situation.

Estimates suggest that 2.8 billion people – 42% of the global population – are unable to afford a healthy diet, and 783 million people are facing hunger. Hunger and the poor quality of diets have a direct effect on levels of child wasting. If not addressed with sustainable solutions, today's crisis will have devastating impacts tomorrow and for generations to come.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION

Prevention programmes are an essential component of approaches to tackle wasting. This is because prevention lessens the likelihood of children dying, ensures that they grow and develop properly, reduces the burden on national health systems, and pre-empts human suffering. Additionally, treatment does not tackle the causes of wasting, so it does not stop the recurrence of cases, either in the same individual or in others.

Despite the importance of prevention, most national and global efforts to tackle wasting continue to focus on the management and treatment of the condition.

## WFP'S APPROACH

WFP, as the world's largest humanitarian organization fighting hunger and malnutrition worldwide, works to prevent wasting through targeted interventions, and by supporting increased availability, access, demand for and consumption of safe and nutritious foods.

Given that women experience greater food insecurity and vulnerability to malnutrition than men, and that as much as 30% of child wasting occurs in utero, WFP targets pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls (PBWG) with its prevention programming, alongside children.

WFP is using its global footprint to implement context-specific solutions to prevent wasting, starting from the premise that a child's nutritional needs can only be met within the setting of a food secure household. Therefore, nutritionally adequate food assistance for households with vulnerable children and PBWG serves as the basis for further, targeted interventions.

Alongside the household food basket, WFP provides children and PBWG with targeted support that meets their specific nutrient requirements. Depending on the context, this takes the form of cash or vouchers for nutritious foods, or the provision of specialized nutritious foods (SNFs), alongside Social & Behaviour Change. WFP also works in partnership with other actors, including national governments, UNICEF and trusted non-governmental organisations, to mitigate childhood diseases which, alongside inadequate diets, directly cause wasting.

Child wasting, the most deadly form of malnutrition, is entirely preventable. Global progress in reducing wasting must be accelerated if we are to achieve SDG2 by 2030, and end malnutrition in all its forms.



### CASH FOR PREVENTION IN SOMALIA

Despite its negligible greenhouse gas emissions, Somalia is being devastated by climate change. Three years of drought, the longest on record, caused 43,000 deaths and forced 1.5 million people from their homes. This was followed by flash flooding which drowned land and livestock, and displaced 219,000 people. Out of a population of 17 million, 6.7 million Somalis face acute food insecurity, 300,000 face catastrophic hunger, and 1.8 million children are threatened by wasting. WFP is working to prevent wasting in Somalia through a cash for prevention programme (C4PX) implemented in the internal displacement camps and host communities of Mogadishu and Baidoa.

Beneficiaries are households who already receive WFP's general food assistance, and which contain children under 5 or PBWG. Alongside general food assistance, these households are also being given a top up, in the form of a cash transfer or SNF, to meet the nutrient needs of young children and their mothers. Social & Behaviour Change activities - including radio dramas, call-in shows, radio spots and multimedia - are being rolled out to inform beneficiaries about maternal, infant and child nutrition. In addition, the programme is strengthening linkages with health services, to provide screening for wasting, and referral where needed.

Throughout the lifetime of the programme, a study is also taking place to determine whether the cash or SNF top up is the most effective intervention to prevent wasting in the context of Somalia.