

CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH IN DISASTER AND CRISIS

INTERNATIONAL PEDIATRIC ASSOCIATION

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“Healthy Children for a Healthy World”



Child health in Disaster Relief: Summary Points

- Children are vulnerable and have unique physical and psychosocial needs which are closely intertwined with those of the mother and family.
- Pediatricians and child health personnel can be trained in disaster preparedness and response at country and regional levels.
- Trained child and maternal health personnel should be an integral part of disaster assessment and relief efforts.



The Scope of Childhood

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines childhood as the period between birth and 18 years.
- Children represent more than 50% of the population of many countries in the developing world.
- Childhood includes distinct stages of development and needs.
 - Newborn
 - 0 -5 years
 - 6 - 11 years
 - 12 - 18 years -- adolescence



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Unique Aspects of Childhood

- Vulnerability: Survival depends on protection and nurturing of the adult world
- Cognitive development: Incomplete
- Child health issues: Differ from those of adults
 - Physical and cognitive capacities
 - Physiologic status
 - Disease susceptibility and disease expression
 - Appropriate supplies (including drugs) and equipment
 - Psychosocial needs
- Solutions: Differ and require knowledge of child health and child development



Child Health in Crisis

- Broad scope of child health
 - Physical health
 - Psychosocial health
 - Maternal and family health
- Initial assessments of disaster areas must include attention to the numbers and needs of children involved.
- Both acute and long-term needs must be considered early in the crisis situation.



Child Health in Crisis: Physical Health

- Basic newborn care including breastfeeding
- Management of injuries
- Safe environment
- Water and sanitation, shelter and clothing
- Adequate nutrition: protein, calories, micronutrients
- Surveillance, prevention, and treatment of infectious diseases
- Acute respiratory infections and pneumonia
- Diarrheal disease
- Prevention of accidents
- Protection from violence and exploitation



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Child Health in Crisis: Psychosocial Aspects

- Witness to loss
 - Family, home, community, future
- Loss of structured events such as school
- Dislocation, refugee status
- Alone without family: unaccompanied children
- Acute fear and anxiety, depression
- Long-term psychological problems
 - Continuing fear and anxiety
 - Chronic depression
 - Personality disorder
- Loss of hope for the future



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How Can Children's Needs Be Met in Times of Crisis?

- Clear definition and understanding of child and family needs by emergency relief personnel
- Inclusion of child health personnel in disaster assessment and planning
- Attention to broad concept of child health
 - Physical health
 - Psychosocial health
 - Maternal and family health
- Consideration of both acute and long-term needs and establishment of acute and long-term priorities
- Disaster preparedness
 - A trained and available workforce for child health
 - Adequate resource allocation for children's needs



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The International Pediatric Association

- The Pediatric Associations of 143 countries and 10 world regions, and 11 international specialty societies
- A broad concept of child health: whole child and family
- Training course and teaching materials related to children's needs in disaster relief
- Courses and workshops in disaster preparedness for country and regional child health personnel
- Establishment of registry of trained child health personnel who can be called on by governments and relief agencies in times of need



International Pediatric Association Program in Child Health in Humanitarian Emergency

- Child health personnel trained in Thailand, 2001 (Khon Kaen University), Pakistan January 2002 (Peshawar), Ethiopia December 2002 (Union of African Pediatric Associations), Nicaragua and Panama 2003 (Association of Latin American Pediatricians), Syria 2004 (Damascus), India 2004 (New Delhi), Thailand March 2005 (Bangkok - course on psychosocial aspects for teachers and health personnel) and May 2005 (Khon Kaen - course for regional child health personnel)



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Summary

- Children have unique needs in disaster and crisis situations.
- Children are vulnerable and comprise a large percentage of those affected by disasters.
- Child health encompasses physical and psychosocial needs of children and mothers and families, and requires both acute and long-term planning and attention.
- Evidence-based knowledge pertinent to children and disaster should be collected, and further knowledge sought as needed.
- Personnel with knowledge and experience in child and family health must be included in relief assessments and efforts.
- Pediatricians and other child health personnel can be trained in disaster preparedness for children and families at country level.
- Governments and relief agencies can call on such disaster preparedness trained personnel in time of need.
- Effective collaborations between Government, child health professionals, UN agencies, NGO's and donors are essential.

