

## Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus — the Silent Killer



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Maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) is a deadly disease that is caused by the tetanus bacteria or its spores which enter the body through open wounds such as the cut end of the umbilical cord just after delivery. One newborn dies every 9 minutes and thousands of women die every year due to tetanus.

### MNT is an indicator of inequity in health service delivery.

It accounts for a significant proportion of neonatal deaths, predominantly in poor countries where women have limited or no access to healthcare and many are forced to give birth at home in an unhygienic environment.

### A preventable disease

MNT is completely preventable through immunisation and hygienic birth practices. A woman can be protected (vaccinated with 3 doses of Tetanus Toxoid) for at least five years for US \$1.80. Tetanus Toxoid is a safe, highly effective and inexpensive vaccine that can save thousands of lives each year. In addition, having skilled birth attendants assist deliveries, helps in preventing this fatal condition.

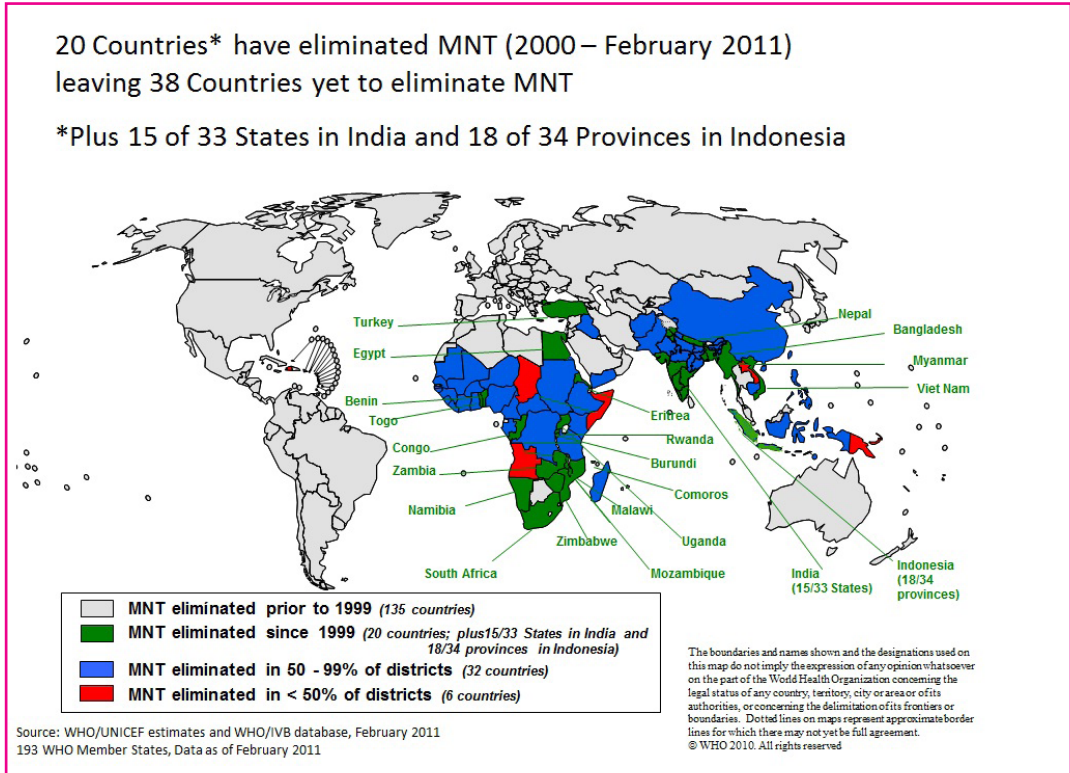
*MNT still threatens the lives of millions of women and their newborn babies in 40 countries across the globe and affects the poorest and most underprivileged populations.*

### The MNT Elimination Goal

The global MNT Elimination Goal was launched at the World Health Assembly in 1989 to reduce neonatal tetanus as a public health problem (defined as less than one case of neonatal tetanus per 1,000 live births in every district) in all countries. Currently, the target year for global elimination of MNT is 2015. Maternal tetanus is considered to be eliminated as a public health problem when neonatal tetanus elimination has been achieved.

### 38 countries must eliminate MNT by 2015

Good progress has been made in the last 20 years since the NT elimination programme began. MNT has been eliminated in much of the developed world.



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Global deaths from NT were estimated at 59,000 in 2008 — a 92% reduction from the late 1980s.

Currently, 38 countries have not yet eliminated MNT. These are primarily in Asia and Africa.

### Continuing challenges

- **MNT is a silent killer.** It is non-contagious. It affects poor and underprivileged populations with no political voice. Thus, it is difficult to get political commitments.
- **Operational challenges exist** in reaching all women at risk with Tetanus Toxoid vaccines in priority countries where security is an issue.
- **Funding constraints:** The programme needs to mobilize more than US \$110,00,000 in the next three years to reach the goal by 2015.

### Partners in eliminating MNT

Partnerships have been successfully galvanized in public and private sectors to support the MNT Elimination Initiative. Among the major partners that have supported UNICEF in this initiative are WHO, UNFPA, CDC, USAID (BASICS), the US Fund for UNICEF and other National Committees, PATH, Becton and Dickinson, Pampers through Proctor and Gamble, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Kiwanis International.

### How you can help

To join the partnership you can make a financial or in-kind contribution and advocate to raise awareness to support the MNT initiative through UNICEF. Your partnership with UNICEF will save and improve the lives of the world's most vulnerable women and children.

For more information, please write to:  
[immunization@unicef.org](mailto:immunization@unicef.org)

Visit the MNT web portal at  
[http://www.unicef.org/health/index\\_43509.html](http://www.unicef.org/health/index_43509.html)