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SUCCESS STORY

Child Death Rate Due to Pneumonia Reduced by 50 Percent in Southwest Haiti

Simple, cost-effective solutions save one-and-a-half-year-old Jovenson's life



Photo: USAID/Karie Atkinson

A community health care worker uses a stop watch to count the number of breaths 18-month-old Jovenson takes in a minute. Rapid breathing is one of the symptoms associated with pneumonia.

“If a neighbor’s child is suffering from similar symptoms to the ones my child has, I will tell them they must see the health agent who can help get medicines quickly,” says Jovenson’s mother.

Eighteen-month-old Jovenson is from Poussière, a village in the county of Jeremie in southwest Haiti. He is suffering from pneumonia.

The infant is being treated at one of 60 USAID-supported mobile medical clinics run by the Haitian Health Foundation that make monthly visits to local villages in Jeremie. Pneumonia is the second-leading cause of death in Haiti among children under age 5, but this USAID program has cut those rates in half in southwest Haiti.

The clinics provide basic primary health services to some 200,000 people in Jeremie and the surrounding villages, including vaccinations to prevent diseases like polio and measles; vitamin A to prevent blindness; examinations to detect malnutrition; treatment of diarrhea and malaria; and prenatal and post-childbirth consultations and counseling that encourages exclusive breastfeeding.

Many pneumonia patients, who suffer from rapid breathing, fever, and chills, live far from medical care. For them, the commute to the nearest hospital can be a challenge. The nearest and only hospital for those living in and around Poussière is in Jeremie, a two-hour drive by car on unpaved roads that are especially treacherous during the rainy season, when the Grand’Anse River swells and becomes difficult to cross.

Jovenson’s mother heard about the mobile clinic through a health agent in her village who advertised it via a megaphone. Health agents are assigned to specific villages where they live close to their target communities and are available 24 hours a day. Their responsibilities include spreading health messages and identifying, treating, and referring illnesses. Typically, a health agent covers between 1,500 and 3,000 people.

“My child is responding to the medicine. If a neighbor’s child is suffering, I will tell them they must see the health agent who can help get medicines quickly,” says Jovenson’s mother. Fortunately, the child’s pneumonia has been caught in time.

A trained community health care worker used a stop watch to count the number of breaths Jovenson took in a minute and was able to diagnose his pneumonia (rapid breathing is one of the symptoms associated with pneumonia). Jovenson was immediately started on an eight-day course of antibiotics that costs only 25 cents and which probably saved his life.

In addition, USAID supports one-week training courses in how to treat pneumonia in children for community health workers working in remote rural settings across Haiti.

July 2006

U.S. Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov