



## SUCCESS STORY

# Childhood Illnesses Get A Second Look

**Evidence-based strategy gives local providers new way to treat disease**



Family physicians in Lebap Province practice newly learned skills in handling childhood illnesses taught during USAID-funded trainings.

***Two USAID health projects have been working with the Ministry of Health since 2002 to implement the WHO-recommended Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses strategy to improve the health of children in Turkmenistan.***

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Aysoltan Halitova, a family physician from Mary Province, took part in a 12-day USAID-supported Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) training. The IMCI strategy focuses on home care for the majority of cases, with more serious symptoms addressed in the outpatient primary care setting and only the most serious cases referred for inpatient hospital care.

When children become ill, incorrect or unnecessary treatment can mean prolonged sickness (and, in some cases, death) from conditions that are often easily treatable. By providing doctors with evidence-based tools to assess and manage common conditions in children under age 5, the IMCI strategy aims to reduce the most common causes of death among young children.

Aysoltan was skeptical about using the IMCI strategy as it differs from how physicians typically manage child illness in Turkmenistan. The traditional approach recommends decreased food and drink, and encourages referrals to specialists, hospitalization, and the use of multiple drugs in the treatment of even simple conditions like diarrhea. Nevertheless, she decided to give the new methods a try when her son got pneumonia. She was pleased to see that her son's infection quickly cleared up, and now Aysoltan is using IMCI-recommended treatments on all of her young patients.

Aysoltan is just one of the nearly 800 physicians trained in IMCI with USAID assistance. USAID has been working with the country's Ministry of Health since 2002 to implement the IMCI strategy in the country. Until recently, USAID was providing trainings in two districts in each of the country's five provinces. At the ministry's request, the training is expanding to include doctors from other districts as well.

Thanks to the support for the IMCI strategy, positive changes are taking place in health care to benefit Turkmenistan's children. There is evidence that the health of children in the pilot districts is improving; the number of preventative visits to primary health care facilities has increased while visits for treatment and hospital referrals have decreased.