

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
05-14-2020

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UHC MEETING
May 15, 2020

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, everyone.

Let me first thank our hosts — Japan, Thailand and Georgia — for bringing us together to discuss this important issue.

Georgia and Thailand both responded early and effectively to the pandemic.

And Japan's recent contribution (\$US\$83 million) to UNICEF's COVID-19 responses in 30 countries, including in Africa and the Middle East is making a huge difference. Thank you!

Funding like this is essential. Not only to provide personal protective equipment, health and nutrition services, and information so communities, families and children know how to stay safe. But to strengthen health systems for the future — to prevent future waves of COVID-19 infection, and ensure stronger capacity for quality, affordable health-service deliver in the years ahead.

This long-term approach to health systems is at the heart of UNICEF’s work to support the wellbeing of children and mothers in communities worldwide. Our vision of Universal Health Coverage will only be made real if we strengthen primary health care services in the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

Many low and middle-income countries already contend with inadequate, underfunded or non-existent health, water, sanitation, diagnostic and laboratory services. COVID-19 has dramatically exposed these lingering weaknesses — weakness that make it difficult, if not impossible, for these countries to identify, track, and isolate infections.

At the same time, these weak health systems, combined with the pressures of the COVID-19 response, threaten to restrict access to other vital services that prevent disease. For example, reports indicate that during the Ebola outbreak (2014-16), the number of deaths caused by measles, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis attributable to weak or underused health systems exceeded deaths from Ebola.

Communities need to feel confident in the quality and safety of essential health services — even during a pandemic.

That's why UNICEF has developed a three-pronged approach to the health-sector response to COVID-19:

- Ensuring access to care for children and women affected by COVID-19.
- Maintaining routine essential maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health care during the pandemic.
- And strengthening health systems for the future — so they can provide these services in the future, while being prepared to handle future epidemics.

This is an important moment for UHC. And we need the support of our governments and donors.

We need investment into primary health care that can help address COVID while we build stronger systems for the future. This includes stronger water, sanitation and hygiene services in health facilities. And it includes investments in essential health services and equipment, like oxygen systems.

And we need governments to ensure that health services are accessible to all — not only during the pandemic, but in all health emergencies. As COVID-19 shows, a threat to one community is a threat to all communities.

UNICEF will continue working with governments like yours, partners like WHO, and donors and communities worldwide —not only to respond to health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, but towards achieving universal health coverage by 2030.

Thank you very much.
