

# We can save a child for just \$44

By William H. Frist  
For the Journal-Constitution  
Wednesday, May 27, 2009

Since swine flu grabbed the world's attention a month ago, 750,000 young children have died.

So you might wonder why nobody is talking about a pandemic of pneumonia or diarrhea — the two biggest killers of these children.

One reason is that the word “pandemic” means worldwide epidemic.

In other words, there are more cases of a disease than normal, and they're occurring everywhere, even in the United States. Sadly, 25,000 children dying each day is “normal.”

It's also widely unnoticed, because most of the young lives are lost in poor countries far away.

But most of these deaths are easily preventable. Why should we treat this as business as usual?

Through remarkably low-cost proven solutions and committed leadership, the United States can usher in an era where millions of mothers don't have to bury their babies within the first five years of life.

And we can accomplish the task with a smaller price tag than the well-spent money we've put toward the global fight against AIDS in the last several years.

What's grown to more than a \$5 billion annual investment in the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief has brought life-saving treatment for and prevention of HIV to millions.

It's also brought us goodwill and a safer and more secure planet.

For just a fraction of that money, Congress can follow President Obama's cue and prevent many more needless deaths of mothers and their children, and the incalculable suffering these bring.

I congratulate the president not only for pledging to continue his predecessor's initiatives to fight AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, but for envisioning a new comprehensive global health strategy focused on the key interventions that will safeguard the health of mothers, newborns and children.

Now the dollars to do something about it must follow. U.S.-funded programs strengthen and expand the delivery of a package of basic child health interventions that cost about \$44 per year per child.

These interventions, delivered by local health workers in clinics and in communities, include immunizations, breast-feeding and newborn care counseling, and treatment for childhood killers like pneumonia, diarrhea and malaria.

What a legacy for our 44th President to establish — \$44 to provide preventative and curative care to children in impoverished lands.

These affordable interventions work. If we double the \$495 million the United States currently spends in this area, we could reach more than 22 million children with care and save more than a million lives each year.

Our leadership could encourage other G8 nations to make significant contributions of their own.

But our government must first commit the resources to make all of this happen.

Even as we grapple with a financial crisis and economic downturn, polling shows that the American people favor foreign aid that saves children's lives.

I've witnessed how powerful our contributions can be.

Every year I go to Africa, where I've seen expanded access to health care save lives and spread peace and goodwill.

In Sudan, men from different sides of the conflict showed up at a school where I performed surgery.

In Nairobi, I met a mother who named her young daughter America because U.S.-funded HIV treatments gave the girl a future.

Just think what wiping out millions of child deaths could mean to parents and societies around the world.

Let's lend the name of America to a new legacy that redefines normal for child mortality worldwide.

Former GOP Senate Majority Leader William H. Frist, a physician, is the chairman of Save the Children's Survive to 5 campaign.

<http://www.ajc.com/services/content/opinion/stories/2009/05/27/fristed0527.html>