



Clostridium tetani

Welcome to the first issue of The Eliminate Project Newsletter.

Medical science has long known how to prevent tetanus; so why does it still kill nearly 60,000 babies every year?

Françoise Gasse, MD, remembers the remote villages in Sudan well, for the worst of reasons. Residents in those villages saw as many as 10 to 20 of their newborn infants suffer agonizing deaths each year from neonatal tetanus—or, as they called it “the black bird disease.”

“They believe that when a newborn has tetanus, it means there was a crow, a black bird, sitting on the top of the house at the time of delivery,” Gasse explains.

A renowned expert on the disease—he’s known as “Dr. Tetanus” by his colleagues—Gasse was in Sudan as part of his impassioned mission to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT), initially doing extensive work with the World Health Organization and UNICEF and now as a freelance consultant. While rarely seen in Western society, MNT is shockingly common—and just as shockingly under-reported—in some of the world’s most remote regions, such as Southern and East Asia and Africa.

“India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Chad, Angola, Laos to name a few, and many sub-Saharan countries are still at risk and neonatal tetanus is responsible for too many deaths,” Gasse adds.

MNT cases are rarely reported, but community mortality surveys—investigations of infant deaths and their causes in randomly selected villages and

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Did you know?

Q: Which country most recently eliminated MNT?

A: Mozambique

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communities—and WHO model estimates have shown it actually kills 59,000 infants and a significant number of mothers annually.

Fortunately for the Sudanese villagers, they're close to escaping from those painful statistics. Sudan, with the support of UNICEF, implemented a maternal vaccination campaign, a key component in the fight against MNT. Once a mother is properly vaccinated, not only is she protected, but she passes along immunization and protection to her newborn child for the first two months of life.

On a subsequent visit two years later, Gasse asked the villagers about the health of their newborns. [More...](#)

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