

WHAT IS IMCI?

IMCI stands for Integrated Management of Childhood Illness. It is a strategy that has been developed by WHO's Division of Child Health and Development and UNICEF, and has been introduced in more than 30 countries around the world. The strategy focuses on the child as a whole rather than on a single disease or condition: Sick children often present with a number of sicknesses to the primary care practitioner and thus need to be managed in an integrated manner at home and in the primary health care facility.

WHY DO WE NEED IMCI?

In developing countries, many children die from these illnesses :

- ⊙ Pneumonia
- ⊙ Diarrhoea
- ⊙ Malnutrition

In South Africa measles and malaria have become less of a problem. However HIV/AIDS is killing more and more children.

Many of these conditions can be prevented or treated with simple case management, including HIV/AIDS.

Why then do we still have these childhood conditions? There may be inadequate living conditions, such as poor water supply and sanitation, which promote the rapid spread of disease. If children are sick, parents may not recognise that their children are dangerously ill and not take them for appropriate treatment. When treatment is sought at a health care facility, the health care workers treating the child may lack drugs, equipment or training to provide good care. Health workers may also not recognise that a child may have more than one condition in need of treatment. For example, a child with pneumonia may also have malnutrition, an ear problem and symptomatic HIV infection.

IMCI IS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

IMCI takes into account the variety of factors that put children at serious risk. It ensures the combined treatment of the major childhood illnesses. It speeds up urgent treatment of seriously ill children. It involves parents in effective care of their children at home where possible. It emphasizes prevention of disease through immunization, improved nutrition and exclusive breastfeeding. IMCI supervision and support of the health facilities is also integrated into the drive to support and monitor primary health care.

IMCI IS COST EFFECTIVE

IMCI reduces wastage of resources by identifying and promoting the most appropriate medicines and treatments. E.g. There are definite guidelines of when and when to not use an antibiotic. IMCI avoids duplication of effort from a series of separate disease control programs.

WHAT DOES THE IMCI CLINICAL PROCESS CONSIST OF?

- ⊙ Assessment and classification of the illness
- ⊙ Treatment of the child
- ⊙ Counselling the caregiver
- ⊙ Advice on follow-up of the patient

STANDARD CASE MANAGEMENT (SCM)

Sick children are assessed according to their symptoms and signs. This process uses reliable clinical signs to classify the illness according to the level of intervention required :

- ⊙ Severely ill, requires urgent hospital referral.
- ⊙ Moderately ill, requiring specific treatment at PHC facility and at home.
- ⊙ Mildly ill, requiring supportive therapy and counseling at home.

Health care practitioners are taught to rationalize treatment, prescribing the minimum number of essential medicines.

IMCI focuses on pneumonia, diarrhea, fever and malnutrition, but other childhood illnesses are also identified and treated using the guidelines. In South Africa, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis is an increasing problem, and the guidelines have been adapted to cover this. Anemia and micronutrient deficiencies are dealt with, and there are sections on intestinal parasite control, identification and treatment of ear conditions and asthma.

THE 3 COMPONENTS OF IMCI

IMCI - CASE MANAGEMENT

This consists of training health professionals who function at primary level in standard case management skills through an 11 day IMCI Clinical Course. Training includes support, mentoring and other activities to promote the use of IMCI case management skills.

IMCI - SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION

This involves ensuring :

- ⊙ Follow-up visits within 6 weeks of doing the course
- ⊙ Essential drugs are available
- ⊙ The quality of supervision and support of practitioners is high
- ⊙ Effective monitoring and evaluation
- ⊙ Efficient stock control of medicines
- ⊙ Efficient transport systems for quick referral to hospitals

