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Fewer kids dying around the world

Study shows under-five mortality rate has fallen

WASHINGTON: Fewer children are dying around the world, with deaths among children under five falling in almost every country, US researchers reported.

Using a new method of calculating mortality that they said was more complete and accurate than previous methods, the team at the University of Washington said on Sunday the number of deaths of children under five had plummeted from 11.9 million in 1990 to 7.7 million in 2010.

The findings are similar to a September report by the United Nation's children's fund that showed better malaria prevention and using drugs to protect newborns of AIDS-infected mothers lowered mortality from 12.5 million under-five deaths in 1990 to 8.8 million in 2008.

But the new estimates suggested that 800,000 fewer young children died than Unicef estimated.

"Previous estimates had shown child deaths falling slowly and neo-natal deaths nearly at a standstill," Julie Knoll Rajaratnam, who led the study, said in a statement.

"We were able to double the amount of data and improve the accuracy of our estimates to find that children are doing better today than at any time in recent history, especially in the first month of life."

Globally, the team said 3.1 million newborns died in the past year, 2.3 million infants and 2.3 million children aged one to four.

Writing in the *Lancet* medical journal, Knoll and colleague Christopher Murray said they found under-five mortality was falling in every region of the world with increases in only Swaziland, Lesotho, Equatorial Guinea and Antigua and Barbuda.

Every year, mortality goes down more than 2% for children, they said.

"One of the biggest achievements of the past 20 years has been this incredible progress in countries that historically have had the highest child mortality in the world," Murray said.

Some findings, available at <http://www.healthmetricsandevaluation.org>:

- In Ethiopia, 202 per 1,000 children born died by age five in 1990, one of the highest rates in the world. By 2010, that rate has dropped by half to 101 per 1,000;

- Singapore had a child mortality rate of eight per 1,000 in 1990, but now has the lowest rate in the world with two under-five deaths per 1,000;

- The United States ranks 42nd in the world with a 2010 under-five mortality rate of 6.7 per 1,000; and

- This is about the same as Chile, with a 6.5 per 1,000 mortality rate and far below Portugal with 3.3 and Sweden with 2.7. — Reuters