

Media Update

11 January 2017

UNICEF

Press Release

Early Moments Matter for children's brain development, UNICEF

NEW YORK, 10 January 2017 – UNICEF today launched #EarlyMomentsMatter, a new campaign supported by the LEGO Foundation to drive increased awareness about the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life and the impact of early experiences on the developing brain.

During this critical window of opportunity, brain cells can make up to 1,000 new connections every second – a once-in-a-lifetime speed. These connections contribute to children's brain function and learning, and lay the foundation for their future health and happiness. A lack of nurturing care – which includes adequate nutrition, stimulation, love and protection from stress and violence – can impede the development of these critical connections.

The campaign kicks off with #EatPlayLove – a digital and print initiative aimed at parents and caregivers that shares the neuroscience on how babies' brains develop. #EatPlayLove assets explain the science in a straightforward, visually interesting way to encourage parents and caregivers to continue to make the most of this unrivaled opportunity to provide their children with the best possible start in life.

By engaging with families, the initiative also aims to drive demand for quality, affordable early childhood development services and to urge governments to invest in programmes targeting the most vulnerable children.

According to a recent [series](#) in *The Lancet* nearly 250 million children in developing countries are at risk of poor development due to stunting and poverty. But the need for greater investment and action in early childhood development is not limited to low-income countries. Disadvantaged children



living in middle- and high-income countries are also at risk. UNICEF estimates that millions more children are spending their formative years growing up in unstimulating and unsafe environments, putting their cognitive, social and emotional development at risk.

Investment in early childhood is one of the most cost effective ways of increasing the ability of all children to reach their full potential – increasing their ability to learn in school and, later, their earning capacity as adults. This is especially significant for children growing up in poverty. One 20-year study showed that disadvantaged children who participated in quality early childhood development programmes as toddlers went on to earn up to 25 per cent more as adults than their peers who did not receive the same support.

Early childhood development interventions, such as the *Care for Child Development* package that includes training community health workers to teach families about the importance of playing with their children in a way that stimulates healthy development can cost as little as 50 cents (USD) per capita per year, when combined with existing health services.

UNICEF is calling for governments to increase investments in early childhood, expand health and social services offered to young children, and strengthen support services for parents and caregivers.

This campaign is part of UNICEF's broader programme on early childhood development, supported by H&M Foundation, The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, ALEX AND ANI, and IKEA Foundation.

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Notes to Editors:

For multimedia content including a conceptual film and photo essays please visit:

<http://uni.cf/2jbbhwe>

About UNICEF

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit www.unicef.org.

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