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Global, regional, and national disease burden estimates of acute lower respiratory infections due to respiratory syncytial virus in young children in 2015: a systematic review and modelling study

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Summary

Background We have previously estimated that respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) was associated with 22% of all episodes of (severe) acute lower respiratory infection (ALRI) resulting in 55 000 to 199 000 deaths in children younger than 5 years in 2005. In the past 5 years, major research activity on RSV has yielded substantial new data from developing countries. With a considerably expanded dataset from a large international collaboration, we aimed to estimate the global incidence, hospital admission rate, and mortality from RSV-ALRI episodes in young children in 2015.

Methods We estimated the incidence and hospital admission rate of RSV-associated ALRI (RSV-ALRI) in children younger than 5 years stratified by age and World Bank income regions from a systematic review of studies published between Jan 1, 1995, and Dec 31, 2016, and unpublished data from 76 high quality population-based studies. We estimated the RSV-ALRI incidence for 132 developing countries using a risk factor-based model and 2015 population estimates. We estimated the in-hospital RSV-ALRI mortality by combining in-hospital case fatality ratios with hospital admission estimates from hospital-based (published and unpublished) studies. We also estimated overall RSV-ALRI mortality by identifying studies reporting monthly data for ALRI mortality in the community and RSV activity.

Findings We estimated that globally in 2015, 33·1 million (uncertainty range [UR] 21.6–50.3) episodes of RSV-ALRI, resulted in about 3·2 million (2·7–3·8) hospital admissions, and 59 000 (48 000–74 500) in-hospital deaths in children younger than 5 years. In children younger than 6 months, 1·4 million (UR 1·2–1·7) hospital admissions, and 27 300 (UR 20 700–36 200) in-hospital deaths were due to RSV-ALRI. We also estimated that the overall RSV-ALRI mortality could be as high as 118 200 (94 600–149 400). Incidence and mortality varied substantially from year to year in any given population.

Interpretation Globally, RSV is a common cause of childhood ALRI and a major cause of hospital admissions in young children, resulting in a substantial burden on health-care services. About 45% of hospital admissions and in-hospital deaths due to RSV-ALRI occur in children younger than 6 months. An effective maternal RSV vaccine or monoclonal antibody could have a substantial effect on disease burden in this age group.

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Introduction

Globally, acute lower respiratory infection (ALRI) remains one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in children younger than 5 years. Human respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is the most common viral pathogen identified in children with ALRI. We have previously estimated (from few data) that in 2005, about 33·8 million new episodes of RSV-ALRI occurred worldwide in young children, 10% severe enough to necessitate hospital admission. We also estimated that 55,000 to 199,000 child deaths could be attributed to RSV. Since then, many new RSV studies were initiated, collecting new data. Progress in RSV vaccines and therapeutics has led WHO’s Product Development for Vaccines Advisory Committee (PDVAC) to highlight RSV as “the most likely big new vaccine area with a vaccine likely to be available in the next 5 to 10 years”. Therefore, updated RSV disease burden estimates incorporating latest data are of great relevance for vaccine policy formulation and to prioritise research funding. We established the RSV Global Epidemiology Network (RSV GEN)—a collaboration of more than 70 investigator groups primarily in low-income and middle-income countries to estimate RSV-ALRI disease burden (at global, regional, and national levels) in young children for 2015; and highlight gaps in knowledge for future action.

Methods

Systematic review

We did a systematic literature review (appendix pp 3–6) hand searching of online journals, and scanning reference lists of identified citations to update our previous review. The search included MEDLINE (Ovid), CINAHL, Global Health (1973 onwards), Global Health Library, Web of Science, IndMed, and grey literature (OpenGrey) databases and studies published between June 1, 2009, and Dec 31, 2016. Three authors (TS, EB, and SC) searched the literature in the language (with no language or publication restrictions, and including three Chinese language databases [CNKI, Wanfang and ChongqingVIP for period 1/1/95–31/12/2016 (TS)]) and extracted data independently (disagreements arbitrated and abstractions validated by HN).

We included studies reporting community incidence, hospital admissions, and in-hospital case fatality ratios (CFRs) for RSV confirmed ALRI in 0–4-year-old children. Studies with data for 12 or more consecutive months (except for mortality-related data), and those reporting RSV-ALRI incidence or mortality for the first year of life were reviewed. We excluded studies where RSV was not a primary outcome, and the case definition was not clear or inconsistently applied, RSV diagnosis was based on serology alone, or with less than 50 ALRI cases admitted to hospital.

Research in context

Evidence before this study

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is the most common pathogen identified in young children with acute lower respiratory infections (ALRI), primarily pneumonia and bronchiolitis. Previously, we have estimated that in 2005, RSV was associated with 22% of all childhood ALRI episodes and 3–9% of all deaths. A substantial proportion of the RSV-associated morbidity occurred in the first year of life. We estimated that more than 93% of all RSV-ALRI episodes and 99% of RSV-ALRI mortality occurs in developing countries. However, these estimates were based on few data and were not stratified by narrow age bands for the first year of life. Global RSV-specific mortality estimates (using an alternative model) in young children, by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation in Washington, have ranged from 234,000 (28% of all childhood ALRI) deaths in 2010 to 364,000 (5% of all childhood ALRI) deaths in 2015.

Added value of this study

This study used data from a vastly expanded dataset (329 studies of which 291 were not included in our previous estimates). Another important and unique feature is the use of unpublished data—23% of the included data are unpublished. We have now reported RSV-associated disease burden by severity and World Bank income region for narrow non-overlapping age bands particularly in the first year of life. We developed a risk-factor based model to provide the first estimates of RSV-ALRI burden in young children at national level. We estimated that RSV is associated with about 28% of all ALRI episodes and 13–22% of all ALRI mortality in young children. Using historical RSV case fatality data, we show that, in general, there has been a decreasing trend for RSV associated case fatality ratio across all age groups and income regions.

Implications of all the available evidence

There has been substantial reduction in child pneumonia morbidity and mortality in the past 15 years. With the introduction and scale-up of vaccines against leading bacterial pneumonia (Pneumococcus and Haemophilus influenzae type b), the proportional contribution of viral pathogens like RSV is likely to increase. In the past 5 years, there has been an unprecedented activity in RSV vaccine development. There are more than 60 candidate RSV vaccines in clinical development targeting pregnant women, neonates, and young children. WHO’s Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization has identified absence of age-stratified disease burden estimates, data for RSV mortality in community, and burden data from Africa and south Asia as the key gaps in informing an evidence-based recommendation for the introduction of an RSV vaccine. Our findings should address some of these gaps and assist WHO, donor agencies, regulatory agencies, and policy makers to facilitate the introduction of a novel RSV vaccine in low-income and middle-income countries without delay.

Research Unit, School of Pathology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (Prof S A Madhi PhD, V L Baillie PhD, M Groome PhD, D P Moore MPhil); Department of Science and Technology/ National Research Foundation: Vaccine Preventable Diseases, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa (A Ali MD), Prof O Basat MD); Department of Global Health, Togo (Prof B D Gessner MD, Prof S A Madhi PhD, Prof E S Brookes MD, Prof S Acacio MD, Prof J O Awe MD, Prof A M Patil MD, Prof A Ali MD, Prof D Nokes PhD, Prof J H Schafft MD, Prof D J Nokes PhD); Department of Pediatrics, King George’s Medical University, Lucknow (UP), India (Prof S Awasthi MD, N Pandey MD); Kenya Medical Research Institute-Wellcome Trust Research Programme, Centre for Geographic Medicine Research–Coast, Kilifi, Kenya (Prof E Azziz-Baumgartner MD, Prof J J O Awe MD, Prof D Nokes PhD, Prof J A G Scott FRCP); International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (Prof M Hossain MD, Prof J H Schafft MD, Prof S Acacio MD, Prof A Ali MD, Prof D Nokes PhD, Prof J A G Scott FRCP); Division of Global Health Protection, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA, USA (Prof S A Madhi PhD, Prof L S Johnson MD, Prof A M Patil MD, Prof E S Brookes MD, Prof S Acacio MD, Prof S Källberg MD, Prof S A Madhi PhD, Prof A M Patil MD, Prof E S Brookes MD, Prof S Acacio MD, Prof A Ali MD, Prof D Nokes PhD, Prof J A G Scott FRCP).
RSV GEN formulated common case definitions and agreed on common approaches to data analysis (including re-analysis of already published data) and invited other investigators with relevant data to join RSV GEN. This resulted in analysis of substantial unpublished data to supplement published data (appendix pp 9–12). This study complies with the Guidelines for Accurate and Transparent Health Estimates Reporting (GATHER) recommendations (appendix p 95).4

Definitions
As previously,1 we adapted WHO Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) pneumonia case definitions to include RSV laboratory confirmation; and elected to replace “clinical pneumonia” and “severe pneumonia” with the terms “ALRI” and “severe ALRI” (appendix pp 2, 85). We recognised that WHO IMCI case definitions were developed for use by first level health workers, and for most hospital-based studies the decision for admission to hospital is based on physician’s overall impression (and not IMCI signs alone). Therefore, we developed separate case definitions for hospital-based studies—admission to hospital for RSV-associated (severe or very severe) ALRI (appendix pp 2, 85). We expanded our definition for influenza seasonality to include RSV.5 Any month in which the virus was detected in more than 5% (at least 4) specimens was considered to be within RSV or influenza season. Industrialised and developing country designations followed UNICEF categories.6 We designated countries as high, upper-middle, lower-middle, and low-income based on the World Bank’s classification. The child population estimates for 2015 are from UNPD World Population Prospects: 2015 revision.

Statistical analysis
For studies not reporting 0–59 month incidence rates, we imputed any missing age group data using median incidence rate ratios (appendix p 7).7,8,10 We did a sensitivity analysis using un-imputed data and noted final estimates did not differ substantially. When the study was longer than 12 months, but not in multiples of 1 year, we calculated annualised incidence by adjusting for population at risk. If clinical specimens were systematically collected in a narrow age band, where possible) for RSV and severe RSV-ALRI approaches.

Figure 1 summarises and gives the rationale for our approach. We did a data meta-analysis (by region and narrow age bands, where possible) for RSV and severe RSV-ALRI incidence, hospital admission rate for RSV-ALRI (studies with well-defined catchment population), proportion of hospital admissions for ALRI that were RSV+ve and in-hospital mortality for ALRI CFR, and report pooled estimates (with 95% CI).11 Because in-study and between study data heterogeneity was anticipated, we used imputed any missing age group data using median incidence rate ratios (appendix p 7).11,12 We did a sensitivity analysis using un-imputed data and noted final estimates did not differ substantially. When the study was longer than 12 months, but not in multiples of 1 year, we calculated annualised incidence by adjusting for population at risk. If clinical specimens were systematically collected in a narrow age band, where possible) for RSV and severe RSV-ALRI approaches.

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In this study, we report four different sets of estimates—number of episodes of (severe) RSV-ALRI at global and national levels, global RSV-ALRI hospital admissions, and global estimates of RSV-ALRI deaths in hospital and overall (in community). This figure summarises our approach for each of these categories and also shows how they relate to (and feed into each other). Global estimates of hospital admissions for RSV-ALRI have been estimated using two independent approaches and datasets (after ensuring all included studies satisfy the common case definition that hospital admission was based on a physician diagnosis of ALRI). Similarly, the in-hospital deaths due to RSV-ALRI are based on studies reporting in-hospital CFR for RSV and RSV-ALRI hospital admissions (again ensuring that all included studies satisfy the common case definition). RSV = respiratory syncytial virus. ALRI = acute lower respiratory infection. hCFR = in-hospital case fatality ratio. VA = verbal autopsy. DHS = demographic and health survey. *For details description of imputation see appendix p 7. †For detailed description of risk-factor based model see appendix pp 54–57.

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**Figure 1: Approaches for estimation of global RSV associated morbidity and mortality in children aged 0–4 years**

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0–4 year ALRI mortality, we estimated RSV attributable ALRI mortality if community based case ascertainment was used. We then calculated the ratio between RSV-ALRI community and in-hospital deaths for each country to yield an “inflation factor”. Because the three inflation factors in these diverse developing country settings were similar, we assumed that these sites, and their inflation factors, are broadly representative of developing countries. We thus applied the mean inflation factor (for developing countries) to the estimated RSV-ALRI inhospital deaths (in developing countries) to estimate the overall RSV-ALRI mortality for this region, and then...
We identified 326 articles (329 studies) with data for community incidence, hospital admissions, in-hospital CFR, and proportion of hospital admissions for ALRI that were RSV+ve cases (figure 2); 250 were published (83 Chinese studies) and 76 were unpublished (figure 2; appendix pp 13–16); and an additional two studies reported incidence of RSV-ALRI outpatient clinic visits in high income countries. All but three studies reported peak RSV-ALRI incidence in children younger than 6 months (table 1; appendix pp 13–14).

We estimated that 30·0 million (95% CI 19·1–47·0) RSV-ALRI episodes occurred in 0–4-year-old children in LMIC in 2015, about a third in the first year of life. An estimated 2·8 million (95% CI 1·3–6·1) RSV-ALRI episodes occurred in high-income countries. Therefore, globally, we estimate 33·1 million (UR 21·6–50·3) RSV-ALRI episodes in young children in 2015. Few data from three (of 14) community based studies indicate a high incidence rate, even in the neonatal period—40 (95% CI 2·5–635·7) episodes per 1000 neonates per year (appendix p 42).

About 20% of (community) cases in young children had lower chest wall indrawing (severe RSV-ALRI); a third observed in infants (table 1, appendix p 43). We also estimated the incidence and number of RSV-ALRI episodes in young children in 132 LMICs in 2015. Despite a wide range of incidence rates from 65·6 (UR 40·3–105·1) per 1000 children per year in Senegal to 31·0 (18·7–50·8) in China, there was only a limited variation in point estimates with very wide uncertainty ranges for most countries (appendix p 87). Five countries (with about 43% of global under-5 children)—India, China, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Indonesia—contributed about half the global RSV-ALRI burden (appendix pp 58–61).

76 hospital-based studies (five in indigenous populations) with passive case ascertainment reported hospital admission rates for RSV-ALRI for young children (appendix pp 17–22). Across all regions, hospital admission rates were highest in infants younger than 6 months. Hospital admission rates were also high in the neonatal period—15·9 (95% CI 4·3–3·8) per 1000 neonates per year in Senegal to 31·0 (18·7–50·8) in China, there was only a limited variation in point estimates with very wide uncertainty ranges for most countries (appendix p 87). Five countries (with about 43% of global under-5 children)—India, China, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Indonesia—contributed about half the global RSV-ALRI burden (appendix pp 58–61).

Data were analysed with Stata version 11.2 and R version 3.0.2.

Results
We identified 326 articles (329 studies) with data for community incidence, hospital admissions, in-hospital CFR, and proportion of hospital admissions for ALRI that are RSV+ve cases (figure 2); 250 were published (83 in Chinese) and 76 were unpublished (figure 3; appendix pp 9-12, 86). 41 studies were in rural, 250 in urban, and 38 in mixed populations. 30 (54%) of 56 developing country studies were either cohort or demographic surveillance site studies; and 26 (46%) were hospital studies with well-defined catchment populations. Only 40 studies (12 published and 28 unpublished) reported disease incidence or hospital admission rate by age group for the full age range; we imputed data in 51 studies (supplementary material pp 6–10). 63 studies (21%) reported the incidence or hospital admission rate or in-hospital CFR by narrow age bands for the first year of life. Only 37 studies (one published and 36 unpublished) reported data for neonates and only 19 studies by RSV sub-type.

Community-based studies with active case ascertainment reported RSV-ALRI incidence (14 studies), severe RSV-ALRI (eight studies) and very severe RSV-ALRI (four studies) in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs; appendix pp 13–16); and an additional two studies reported incidence of RSV-ALRI outpatient clinic visits in high income countries. All but three studies reported peak RSV-ALRI incidence in children younger than 6 months (table 1; appendix pp 13–14).

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Of the 218 hospital-based studies (without clear population denominator) that reported proportion of RSV+ve cases among all hospital admissions for ALRI, only 104 studies reported 0–59 month data (appendix pp 23–32). Using this independent dataset we estimated that about 2.9 million (95% CI 2.6–3.3) hospital admissions for RSV-ALRI occurred in young children in 2015 (appendix pp 46–47). About 85% of all hospital admission cases had chest wall indrawing (data not shown). 28 (61%) of 46 studies recording SpO2 by pulse oximetry used our hypoxaemia case definition and these reported about 20% of all hospital admissions for RSV-ALRI cases aged 0–4 years (all age groups) had hypoxaemia (appendix pp 45, 83–84). This translates to about 1.0 million (UR 0.6–1.6) episodes of hospital admissions for severe RSV-ALRI with hypoxaemia in young children from developing countries, 58% in infants younger than 6 months. We also estimated 0–6 million (UR 0.4–1.1) hospital admissions for very severe RSV-ALRI in young children in developing countries in 2015, 51% in infants younger than 6 months.

Data were insufficient to provide global incidence or hospital admissions by RSV subtype. RSV-A was the more common circulating subtype and resulted in more severe disease (with substantially higher hospital admissions and hCFR) across all age groups (appendix p 48). 48 published and 55 unpublished studies reported hCFR data for young children with RSV-ALRI (appendix pp 33–38). We identified 41 studies from developing countries that reported RSV-associated hCFR in children aged 0–5 months, 6–11 months, and 12–59 months (table 2; appendix pp 39–41, 63). Overall, the highest hCFR was observed in neonates [5.3% (95% CI 2.8–9.8)] and in children from low-income countries. This translates to a substantial in-hospital mortality of about 59,600 deaths (UR 48,000–74,500) in children younger than 5 years globally, 46% occurring in infants younger than 6 months. Because this estimate only includes children admitted to hospital, it is an underestimate due to limited access to care and poor care seeking in LMICs.19

To estimate the overall RSV-ALRI deaths in young children (including those dying outside hospitals), we identified eight LMIC sites that could provide requisite data. However, data from only three sites (multiple villages across rural Bangladesh, urban slums in Buenos Aires, and multiple hamlets in Lombok, Indonesia) met our strict eligibility criteria. Data for both RSV and influenza activity were available from Bangladesh and Buenos Aires. In Bangladesh (after excluding 2010 influenza data which overlapped with second wave of influenza A (H1N1) pdm09 virus pandemic), there was some overlap between RSV and influenza activity during RSV season. We estimated that about 90% (range 86–93) of excess mortality during RSV season can be attributed to RSV (appendix p 64). There was no overlap between RSV and influenza seasons in Buenos Aires in the years studied.10 The “inflation factors” ranged from 1.5 in Argentina to 2.9 in Lombok (appendix p 65). We “adjusted” our estimates for overall RSV-ALRI mortality in developing countries to account for influenza activity during RSV season and estimated that the global RSV-ALRI mortality in young children in developing countries that reported RSV-associated hCFR in children aged 0–5 months, 6–11 months, and 12–59 months...
### RSV-ALRI

| Age Group | Low income | Lower-middle income | Upper-middle income | High income* | Developing countries | Industrialised countries | Global† |
|-----------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| 0-5 months | Studies | 1 (1) | 10 (2) | 3 (1) | 2 (2) | 14 (4) | 2 (2) | 16 (6) |
|            | Incidence (uncertainty range) | 117.2 (108.4–126.6) | 63.3 (38.5–104) | 168.9 (47.9–596.1) | 661 (33.5–130.4) | 82.5 (33.5–130.4) | 661 | .. |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | 1247 (1153–1347) | 2034 (1238–3344) | 2993 (848–10555) | 517 (262–1020) | 5077 (3099–8318) | 448 | 5560 |
| 6-11 months | Studies | 0 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
|            | Incidence (uncertainty range) | .. | 80.7 (48–135.6) | 223 (95.2–522.1) | .. | .. | .. | 98.8 (58.8–166.1) |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | .. | 2595 (1544–4361) | 3948 (1686–9245) | .. | .. | .. | 6082 |
| 0-59 months | Studies | 1 | 10 (6) | 3 (2) | 2 (1) | 14 (8) | 2 (1) | 16 (9) |
|            | Incidence (uncertainty range) | 94 (89.1–99.1) | 40 (25.7–65) | 85 (33.8–216.7) | 35 (16.6–76.2) | 50 (33.5–130.4) | 35 (16.6–76.2) | .. |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | 9541 (9044–10053) | 12864 (8081–20478) | 14887 (5876–37711) | 2841 (1326–6090) | 30516 (19483–47853) | 2482 | 31059 |

### RSV-associated severe ALRI‡

| Age Group | Low income | Lower-middle income | Upper-middle income | High income* | Developing countries | Industrialised countries | Global† |
|-----------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| 0-5 months | Studies | 0 | 7 (2) | 1 | 1 (1) | 8 (2) | 1 (1) | 9 (3) |
|            | Incidence (uncertainty range) | .. | 25.1 (10.7–59.3) | 406.7 (316.4–522.7) | 3.2 (1.8–5.8) | 36.1 (10.1–129.1) | 3.2 | .. |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | .. | 808 (243–1906) | 7201 (5603–9255) | 25 (14–45) | 2222 (622–7945) | 22 | 2174 |
| 6-11 months | Studies | 0 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 0 | .. |
|            | Incidence (uncertainty range) | .. | 19.5 (8.3–45.8) | 82.1 (45.5–148.2) | .. | .. | .. | 24.7 |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | .. | 628 (268–1473) | 1454 (805–2625) | .. | 1521 (707–1272) | .. | .. |
| 0-59 months | Studies | 0 | 7 (4) | 1 (1) | 1 | 8 (5) | 1 | 9 (5) |
|            | Incidence (uncertainty range) | .. | 7.5 (3.1–18) | 86.2 (68.4–108.6) | 3 (1.7–5.5) | 10.2 (3.1–18) | 3 | 3 (1.7–5.5) |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | .. | 2357 (980–5655) | 15003 (11909–18902) | 243 (133–439) | 6145 (2103–17943) | 212 | 6303 |

### Hospital admission for RSV-associated ALRI

| Age Group | Low income | Lower-middle income | Upper-middle income | High income* | Developing countries | Industrialised countries | Global† |
|-----------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| 0-5 months | Studies | 5 (2) | 17 (8) | 15 (9) | 34 (25) | 43 (22) | 28 (22) | 71 (44) |
|            | Hospital admission rate | 7.4 (2.4–22.6) | 22.9 (17.7–29.7) | 23.0 (16.1–32.9) | 26.3 (22.8–30.2) | 20.2 (15.7–24.5) | 27.1 | .. |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | 79 (26–240) | 737 (569–955) | 407 (284–582) | 205 (178–237) | 1243 (1025–1508) | 184 | 1447 |
| 6-11 months | Studies | 4 | 9 | 5 | 9 | 20 | 7 | 27 |
|            | Hospital admission rate | 3.4 (0.6–19.5) | 11.3 (6.1–21.0) | 18.5 (9.8–34.7) | 11.3 (6.1–20.9) | 11.0 (7.7–15.7) | 9.8 | .. |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | 36 (6–207) | 362 (195–674) | 327 (124–615) | 88 (48–163) | 674 (471–963) | 66 | 849 |
| 12-59 months | Studies | 3 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 21 | 5 | 26 |
|            | Hospital admission rate | 0.4 (0.1–1.7) | 1.8 (1.2–2.8) | 2.2 (1.3–3.9) | 1.4 (0.9–2.6) | 1.5 (1.0–2.1) | 1.6 | .. |

*Industrialised countries include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Kingdom, United States.

†Global estimates assume that RSV-ALRI is distributed globally at the same population level as Global estimates in 2004.

‡Studies include: Ali et al. (2012), Bautista et al. (2012), Bryson et al. (2012), Egea et al. (2012), Gomand et al. (2011), Handigol et al. (2012), Hattori et al. (2012), Herrero et al. (2012), Leek et al. (2012), Lim et al. (2012), Liu et al. (2012), Liu et al. (2011), Luo et al. (2012), Mazzola et al. (2012), Miralles et al. (2012), Nakajima et al. (2012), Quintero et al. (2012), Russell et al. (2012), Shah et al. (2012), Smith et al. (2012), Smit et al. (2012), Sun et al. (2012), Tanga et al. (2012), Wadhwa et al. (2012), Yang et al. (2012), Zhang et al. (2012), Zhong et al. (2012), Zou et al. (2012).

**RSV-associated severe ALRI**

| Age Group | Low income | Lower-middle income | Upper-middle income | High income* | Developing countries | Industrialised countries | Global† |
|-----------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| 0-5 months | Studies | 0 | 7 (2) | 1 | 1 (1) | 8 (2) | 1 (1) | 9 (3) |
|            | Incidence (uncertainty range) | .. | 25.1 (10.7–59.3) | 406.7 (316.4–522.7) | 3.2 (1.8–5.8) | 36.1 (10.1–129.1) | 3.2 | .. |
|            | Number of episodes (thousands) | .. | 808 (243–1906) | 7201 (5603–9255) | 25 (14–45) | 2222 (622–7945) | 22 | 2174 |

Table 1 continues on next page
2015 was 118,200 (UR 94,600–149,400). Available morbidity and mortality data show substantial yearly variation in RSV activity and associated ALRI deaths (appendix pp 89–93), suggesting that national, regional, and global RSV morbidity and mortality vary substantially from year to year.

**Discussion**

Our revised RSV burden estimates are based on 329 studies (291 of which were not included in our 2005 estimates). We estimate that globally in 2015 there were about 33·1 million (UR 24·7–40·3) in-hospital RSV-ALRI deaths in (670·5 million) children younger than 5 years.

**Table 1: Estimates of the incidence, hospital admission rate, and number of episodes of RSV-ALRI in children younger than 5 years in 2015, by World Bank income regions and development status**

|                      | Low income | Lower-middle income | Upper-middle income | High income* | Developing countries | Industrialised countries | Global† |
|----------------------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Number of episodes (thousands) | 30 (7-132) | 451 (288-702)        | 305 (173-538)       | 87 (60-128)  | 693 (482-1003)      | 90 (59-140)             | 897 (660-1236) |
| 0-59 months          |            |                     |                     |              |                     |                         |         |
| Number of episodes (thousands) | 168 (73-410) | 157 (1252-1998)    | 1065 (787-1450)    | 383 (322-467) | 2629 (2238-3102)    | 344 (285-427)           | 3216 (2745-3801) |
| RSV-associated hospital admission ALRI with hypoxaemia |
| 0-5 months |
| Studies           | 3          | 2                     | 5                     | 0             | 10                    | 0                       |         |
| Hospital admission rate | 6·1        | 7·1                   | 11·9                  | 8·9           | 8·9                   | 8·9                     |         |
| Number of episodes (thousands) | 65 (32-134) | 227 (88-581)         | 210 (75-589)        | 548           | 548                   | 548                     |         |
| 6–11 months        |            |                      |                      |               |                       |                         |         |
| Studies           | 3          | 2                     | 5                     | 0             | 10                    | 0                       |         |
| Hospital admission rate | 2·1        | 5·8                   | 4·6                   | 3·8           | 3·8                   | 3·8                     |         |
| Number of episodes (thousands) | 23 (6-93) | 186 (98-355)           | 81 (23-285)          | 234           | 234                   | 234                     |         |
| 12–59 months       |            |                      |                      |               |                       |                         |         |
| Studies           | 3          | 0                     | 3                     | 1             | 6                     | 1                       |    7    |
| Hospital admission rate | 0·1        |                       | 0·4                   | 1·8           | 0·3                   | 1·8                     |         |
| Number of episodes (thousands) | 11 (5-27) | (14-211) (113-121)    | (48-363) (99-106)    | (149-458)     |                       |                         |         |
| 0-59 months        |            |                      |                      |               |                       |                         |         |
| Number of episodes (thousands) | 105 (59-196) | 383 (187-810)       | 951 (595-1588)      |               |                       |                         |         |

RSV=respiratory syncytial virus. ALRI=acute lower respiratory infection. Incidence and hospital admission rate are presented as per 1000 children per year. Incidence, hospital admission rate, and number of episodes are presented with 95% CI. *Excludes studies in aboriginal populations in high-income countries. †Although the overall number of cases was obtained by summing the age and region-specific numbers for each of the 10,000 samples in the Monte Carlo simulation, the point estimates and uncertainty interval limits for the overall cases are not equal to the sum of the age and region-specific results. This reflects the fact that the overall estimates are determined by the full uncertainty distributions for each age and region-specific estimates, and not simply the point estimates. ‡Data in parentheses indicate number of studies with imputed data. ¶Incidence estimates (in any age group) are per 1000 children (in that age group) per year. **This is a subset of RSV-ALRI (see appendix p 85).

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Table 2: CFR meta-estimates and number of in-hospital deaths in children with RSV-ALRI in children younger than 5 years in 2015, by World Bank Income regions

| Studies | Low income | Lower-middle income | Upper-middle income | High income | Developing countries | Industrialised countries | Global*† |
|---------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| 0–5 months | hCFR (%)‡| Number of deaths§ | hCFR (%)‡| Number of deaths§ | hCFR (%)‡| Number of deaths§ | hCFR (%)‡| Number of deaths§ |
| 1.2 (0.4–6.8) | 1200 (200–7900) | 2.7 (0.2–3.6) | 2000 (12500–29500) | 1.8 (1.2–2.6) | 7200 (42000–12200) | 0.2 (0.0–12.8) | 400 (1–228200) | 2.2 (1.2–2.7) | 2700 (20700–35500) | <50 (0–2000) | 27300 (20700–36200) |
| 6–11 months | 9.3 (3.0–28.7) | 3400 (400–26600) | 2.8 (1.8–4.4) | 10300 (4800–21600) | 2.4 (1.1–5.4) | 8000 (2800–22100) | 0.9 (0.2–4.0) | 900 (200–4600) | 2.4 (1.9–3.2) | 16500 (10400–25800) | <50 (0–300) | 16500 (10500–26100) |
| 12–59 months | 4.7 (0.7–33.7) | 1400 (100–16100) | 2.7 (1.7–4.3) | 12300 (6500–23100) | 0.5 (0.1–3.5) | 1500 (200–11700) | 0.7 (0.1–5.2) | 700 (100–5600) | 2.2 (1.6–3.0) | 15300 (9500–25000) | 100 (0–300) | 15400 (9500–24900) |
| 0–59 months | 8200 (2200–36900) | 43600 (31400–60400) | 17900 (10300–34500) | 3300 (700–231100) | 59600 (47800–74300) | 200 (100–2200) | 59600 (48000–74500) |

RSV=respiratory syncytial virus. ALRI=acute lower respiratory infection. hCFR=in-hospital CFR. hCFR and number of deaths are presented with 95% CI. *Global total for a given age band is sum of the deaths in developing and industrialised countries. We have taken this more conservative approach because there are only a small number of studies contributing to deaths by World Bank income region in narrow age bands leading to large uncertainties in some of these estimates. †Although the overall number of deaths was obtained by summing the age and region-specific numbers for each of the 10 000 samples in the Monte Carlo simulation, the point estimates and uncertainty interval limits for the overall deaths are not equal to the sum of the age and region-specific results. This reflects the fact that the overall estimates are determined by the full uncertainty distributions for each age and region-specific estimates, and not simply the point estimates. ‡Data in parentheses are 95% CI. §The number of deaths has been rounded to the nearest hundreds.
Hypoxaemia is an important indicator of severity and key predictor of ALRI mortality. About 20% of all children admitted to hospital with RSV-ALRI have hypoxaemia. Our estimates of RSV-ALRI hospital admissions suggest that about half of the severe RSV-ALRI episodes are being admitted to hospital globally and a similar proportion of all RSV deaths occur in hospitals (figure 4). The high proportion of children with severe ALRI who are not admitted to hospital probably reflects limited access to hospital care and conditions that restrict the ability of caregivers to seek hospital care for their children (these studies occurred when WHO recommended hospital admission for all ALRI cases with lower chest wall indrawing). In Kilifi, Kenya the incidence of RSV-ALRI closest to the hospital was twice the overall incidence (21 vs 11 for 1000 infants per year) with many children referred for hospital care not attending because of cost or cultural factors. Our estimates of RSV-ALRI hospital admission show the very large referral burden on hospital services in developing countries and this can be expected to further increase as access to and use of health services increases with socioeconomic development.

These updated estimates of 33·1 million (UR 21·6–50·3) RSV-ALRI episodes resulting in about 3·2 million (UR 2·7–3·8) million hospital admissions show that RSV in children presents a substantial economic burden on health-care services in view that the direct medical costs associated with hospital care for childhood ALRI has been estimated to range from US$243 (95% CI 154–341) to US$559 (269–887) at secondary and tertiary care facilities, respectively, in LMICs; and $2804 (2001–3683) to $7037 (4286–11311) at secondary and tertiary care facilities, respectively, in high-income countries. With an average length of hospital stay for uncomplicated RSV-ALRI in children of about 3 days, this also represents a major challenge for hospital services, requiring substantial investment and seasonal planning both in terms of human resources and provision of relevant medicines and supplies for paediatric care. Simple measures like timely and regular provision of oxygen supplies can substantially decrease RSV-ALRI mortality. The general improvement in diagnosis (particularly availability of pulse oximetry) and improved case management for ALRI is reflected in a decreasing hCFR trend for RSV-ALRI across all age groups and regions (appendix p 94).

A notable difference to our previous estimates is the two-fold increase in the number of severe RSV-ALRI episodes. The current estimate is improved because it is based on many more datapoints and only data from community-based studies employing active case ascertainment (unlike previous estimates based partly on passive case ascertainment studies). However, despite this expanded evidence base, there are still wide uncertainty ranges (appendix p 88). The variation in estimates within countries or regions, and between regions is due to study methodological differences, annual variations in RSV activity (6–75% variation in RSV-ALRI hospital admission rates by year across sites) and variation in RSV epidemiology between study populations. The true uncertainty is wider than that expressed in a standard 95% CI. Data were insufficient to provide regional incidence or hospital admissions rate estimates by RSV subtype.

Several factors affect our estimates, including exact case definitions for (severe) ALRI, case ascertainment method, health-care seeking behaviour of the population, proportion of eligible patients tested for RSV (appendix pp 49–53), geographical location of and environmental conditions at study sites, sample sizes of included studies and differences in sensitivity and specificity of RSV diagnostic assays. Although we used non-specific case definitions in our analyses, several studies used a more restrictive case definition (eg, including wheeze, fever, crepitations, chest wall indrawing, or chest x-ray confirmation). RSV-ALRI hospital admission rates show a clear gradient across World Bank income regions with lower access to care (including longer distance to hospital) and poorer care seeking behaviour in low-income countries. We have also been unable to account for wide
(intracountry) variations in socioeconomic conditions and associated risk factor prevalence in populations residing in middle-income countries.

RSV PCR-based assays were used in 127 of 329 studies; immunofluorescence in 30 studies, direct immunofluorescence assay test in 74 studies, indirect immunofluorescence assay test in 18 studies, ELISA in 12 studies, a mixture in 48 studies, and no details were given in 20 studies. Immunofluorescence assays have variable and lower sensitivity (69–4%) compared with PCR. A sensitivity analysis, including only PCR studies, gave similar hospital admission rate in developing countries (4.6 [95% CI 3.6–5.7] vs 4.9 [4.1–5.8]). We observed a slightly higher incidence rate for community-based studies in developing countries using PCR (59.3 [28.5–121.7] vs 50.8 [32.4–79.6]). Causal attribution of pathogens in childhood ALRI is complex due to healthy respiratory carriage of potential pathogens and common presence of multiple agents and is best assessed in case-control studies. Our recent meta-analysis suggests that in about 90% of cases RSV in a nasopharyngeal specimen can be causally attributed to ALRI.

Our revised estimates are based on a substantially larger number of data points from low-income and middle-income countries. However, no data are available from several high burden populations (eg, in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region and parts of sub-Saharan Africa). Additionally, most studies do not report RSV hospital admission and in-hospital mortality data by narrow age strata in the first year of life, which leads to substantial uncertainty and possible under-estimation of RSV burden in very young children. Unlike in our previous estimate, we have now been able to provide a point estimate with uncertainty ranges for overall RSV-ALRI mortality. However, these are based on very little data and cannot at present support regional mortality estimates. National and regional estimates of burden on health-care systems, long-term sequelae and mortality are required to inform policy for introduction of RSV vaccines and also to assess the effect of these vaccines on morbidity and mortality in young children. Therefore, further research investment to identify RSV-ALRI mortality (in community and in hospitals) in low-income and middle-income countries is warranted.

Contributors

HN and HC conceptualised the study. TS led the literature review with contributions from EB and SC. TS and DAM led the data analysis. HN, HC, KLOB, EAFS, SAM, BDG, and FPP led data interpretation. HN wrote the first draft of the report with inputs from DAM and HC. KLOB, EAFS, SAM, BDG, and FPP critically reviewed and revised the initial draft. All other named authors contributed to development of analysis plan, collection and analysis of primary data, data interpretation, and critically reviewed the revised initial report. All other members of the RSV Global Epidemiology Network contributed to data collection, data analysis, and critically reviewed the report. All authors read and approved the final draft of the report.

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Declaration of interests

DAF and FPP have no conflict of interest to declare. MFR reports grants and personal fees from BMGF and Pfizer, and personal fees from Roche outside of the submitted work. RS and FF report grants from BMGF and WHO during the conduct of the study. SP reports grants from GlaxoSmithKline outside of the submitted work. All other authors declare no competing interests.

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