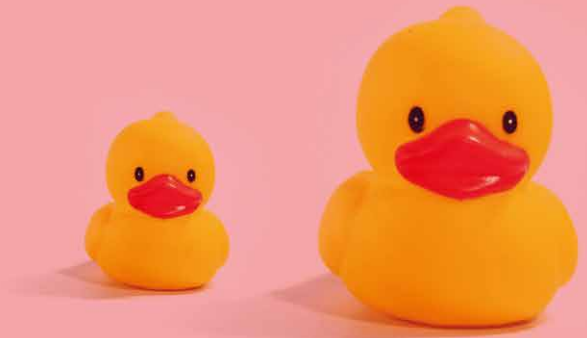


why a child's body size really matters



Stunting, a low height for one's age compared to global child growth standards, is caused by chronic undernutrition and illness in the first 1000 days of life – which is the most critical window of opportunity for ideal health, growth, and neurodevelopment across the lifespan of a person. While the national prevalence of stunting amongst preschool children has decreased, it remains stubbornly persistent in children under the age of six.

Alarming, in South African preschool children aged 0 to 3, 26.9% of boys and 25.9% of girls are stunted. One of the best predictors of an adult's overall health and economic potential is their height at two years of age. Stunting puts this at risk. Eliminating stunting would increase South Africa's GDP by two percent, or R80-billion.

Interventions are required to curb stunting, including strengthening parental care throughout a child's formative years. A mother's psychosocial stress, age at reproduction and her socio-economic status are strong predictors for stunting. Social support including household and family support, healthcare services (provision of

antiretroviral treatment, adherence to treatments, counselling, nutritional supplementation and education) and social services are critical to help pregnant and lactating mothers.

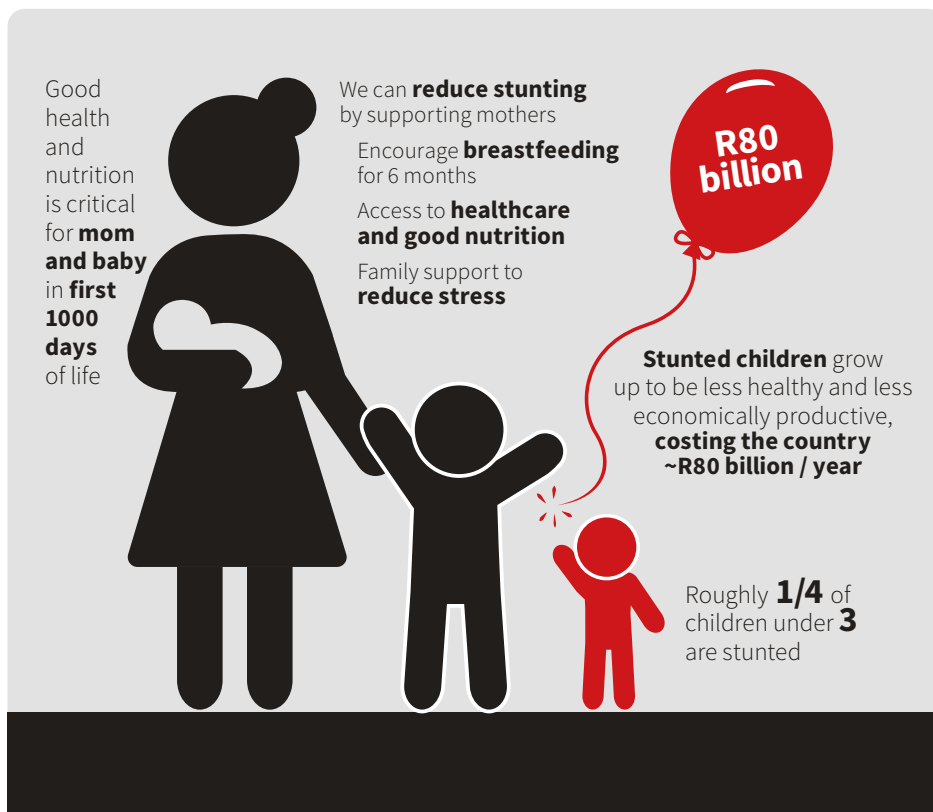
Foundations laid during the first few years of life fundamentally shape people's lifelong physical and mental potential. But threats to prenatal, infant and child growth, such as poor maternal health in pregnancy and in the postnatal period, increase the chances of children becoming ill and subsequently stunted. This is due to the child's growing body focusing on fighting illness and protecting the brain, compromising physical growth.

Moreover, stunting has intergenerational consequences: if a child is stunted, their own children are more likely to be stunted. Intergenerational

This requires a multisectoral response: research showed that stunting hovers between 20 and 30% of the South African population. This is despite the implementation of the Integrated Nutrition Programme in 1996. The entire health system needs to be strengthened and good nutrition in the first 1000 days of life is critical to curbing stunting.

Stunted children grow up to be less healthy and less economically productive, costing the country ~R80 billion / year

Roughly 1/4 of children under 3 are stunted



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



DST-NRF Centre of Excellence
in Human Development

Individual and Society

www.wits.ac.za/coe-human

1st Floor, School of Public Health,
University of the Witwatersrand
York Road, Parktown,
Johannesburg 2193,
South Africa

Director: Prof Shane Norris

www.facebook.com/CoEHuman

twitter.com/CoEHuman



science
& technology

Department:
Science and Technology
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National
Research
Foundation