

Pneumonia 'is a leading child killer'

■ ESTHER MUMBUA

PNEUMONIA and meningitis are among the world's leading child killers, a report says.

The Network for Surveillance of Pneumococcal Diseases in the East African Region (Netspear) says in a report that toddlers aged five and below were at most risk.

"The World Health Organisation estimates that between 800,000 to 1.2 million children die every year around the world as a result of pneumococcal infections," Dr Orin Levine of Johns Hopkins University in the US said at a seminar held in Kilifi.

"Ninety per cent of these deaths occur in the world's poorest countries, which are found in Africa and Asia due

to unavailability of immediate medical care," he said.

"Pneumococcal meningitis is the most severe form of these diseases and one of the most fatal childhood illnesses," he said.

According to Levine, in developing countries, the disease kills or disables 40 to 70 per cent of the children who get it.

"It is also the number one preventable disease in Kenya", he noted.

Netspear was started two years ago to collect medical data in order to develop a vaccine for the disease.

"The vaccine is readily available in America and UK," said Dr Wamae Maranga in a speech.

The lives of 20,000 children can be saved if the vaccine is developed, he said.