

## **Vitamin A Information**

Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children. Xerophthalmia, which is abnormal dryness of the conjunctiva and cornea of the eye, is associated with VAD and when left untreated can lead to blindness. The World Health Organization estimates that worldwide there are approximately 250 million children under the age of five that are affected by VAD. An estimated 250,000 to 500,000 vitamin A deficient children become blind each year. Half of these children die within 12 months of losing their sight.

Although this problem is most prevalent in Africa and South East Asia, it is certainly existent throughout the developing nations. According to UNICEF, "Of 82 countries deemed 'priorities' for national-level vitamin A supplementation programs, 57 had coverage estimates available for 2014. Half of these 57 countries achieved the recommended coverage of 80 percent." As a result, half did not receive the 80 percent level, and for those that did, a significant number of children remained untreated. While the problem is most prevalent in Africa and South East Asia, central American countries are also at risk. "About 40% of Mexican children in rural areas had deficient values of plasma vitamin A" (Rosado, 1995). Furthermore, it was noted as far back as 1989 that vitamin A deficient Guatemalan children grow poorly, are more anemic, have more infections and are more likely to die than their peers (Sommer, 1989).

The World Health Organization recommends that all children between the ages of six months and six years in developing nations that are at risk receive vitamin A supplementation. By receiving this vitamin supplementation, child mortality and blindness can be significantly reduced.