



Because everyone counts

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

CONTRACEPTIVES SAVE LIVES

WOMEN ARE DYING EVERY DAY

IN INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES, where most women have access to contraception, skilled care and emergency obstetric care, deaths owing to pregnancy and childbirth are rare. However, **every minute, somewhere in the world**, a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth, and 20 more suffer disability.

We know what it takes to save women's lives. Universal access to contraception to avoid unintended pregnancies is key. So is access to skilled care during delivery and rapid access to quality emergency obstetric care when needed.

One in three of all deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth could be avoided if women who wanted effective contraception had access to it.

If maternal health is to be improved and Millennium Development Goal 5 is to be met, the international community must re-establish voluntary family planning at the top of the development and funding agenda.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

- Every year, 536,000 women die from pregnancy-related causes—more than 10 million women per generation. Almost all—99 per cent—are in developing countries.
- Another 10 million women suffer injury or disability, such as infection, infertility, depression and obstetric fistulae.
- When women suffer and die, children also suffer and die. Every year, more than 1 million children are left motherless.
- Children who have lost their mothers are up to 10 times more likely to die prematurely than those who haven't.
- In nine sub-Saharan African countries, over 30 per cent of married women have an unmet need for contraceptives. In 15 more countries, the figure is 20 to 30 per cent.
- The risk of a woman dying from pregnancy-related causes during her lifetime is about 1 in 7 in Niger, compared to about 1 in 4,800 in the USA and 1 in 17,400 in Sweden.

Contraception, unsafe abortions and complicated pregnancies

- Some 200 million women of childbearing age want to delay or avoid pregnancy, but 137 million use no method of contraception at all, and 64 million use less-effective traditional methods.
- **Every year, 190 million women become pregnant, at least a third of them unintentionally.**
- Nearly 50 million women resort to abortion every year, and 19 million are done under unsafe conditions. An estimated 68,000 women die each year as a result. Millions more suffer infections and other complications, such as infertility.
- Family planning can prevent the serious health consequences of becoming pregnant within six months of an abortion (anaemia, membrane rupture, low-birth weight, preterm delivery).

Contraception and reproductive health care

- Prompt use of contraception after childbirth can help lengthen the interval between births, benefiting the health of both mother and children.
- An estimated 35 per cent of pregnant women in developing countries have no contact with health personnel prior to giving birth.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, about 70 per cent of women have no contact with health personnel after childbirth— even though this could provide them with the contraceptives they need to postpone future pregnancies.

BENEFITS OF ACTION

- **No woman should die giving life.** Ensuring access to voluntary family planning could reduce maternal deaths by a third, and child deaths by as much as 20 per cent.
- It is estimated that the global cost of maternal and newborn deaths is US\$15 billion per year in lost productivity. Tackling

the problem of maternal death is a significant step towards poverty eradication.

● **Ensuring access to family planning, skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care requires a strong and well-functioning health system benefiting all.**

● Family planning programmes can prevent sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, by promoting condom use. By preventing unwanted pregnancies among HIV-positive women, mother-to-child transmission is averted.

● Access to family planning and the ability to decide when and how many children to have allows women to overcome traditional gender roles and increase their level of education, which most often leads to better health.

WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Efforts to prevent maternal deaths and ensure access to voluntary family planning require political and financial commitment from a broad range of partners: men as well as women, international organizations, governments, civil society and the media.

Long-term and targeted efforts should include:

● Information on and access to contraception and counselling on sexual and reproductive health, and rights for both men and women.

● Strategies to address lack of personnel and to ensure functioning systems of procurement and distribution of contraceptives and the drugs and equipment required for safe motherhood.

● Provision of prenatal care, including information on breast-feeding, immunization, nutrition and family planning services.

● Skilled basic and emergency obstetric care before, during and following childbirth. Special attention must be paid to situations where poverty, conflict, great distances and overloaded health systems obstruct such efforts.

● Post-natal counselling on family planning.

● Programmes to encourage and enable young women to postpone their first pregnancy.

● Sexuality education for young people to enable them to make informed choices about sexuality, marriage and pregnancy.

● National and local debates on the rights of men and women in relation to their bodies, health, education and access to economic and social resources.

It is estimated that by 2015, US\$6 billion in additional funding will be needed from domestic and international sources to accomplish Millennium Development Goal 5: improve maternal health.

WHAT IS UNFPA DOING?

Maternal health is at the core of the UNFPA mission. UNFPA supports activities to prevent maternal deaths in about 90 countries through technical and financial assistance for reproductive health programmes.

UNFPA works in partnership with national governments, other UN agencies and the World Bank to provide family planning, advocate health reforms and upgraded health facilities, improve medical curricula, train midwives and doctors, mobilize communities and promote women's rights.

The Fund has family planning programmes in 140 countries, providing contraceptives to health posts and hospitals that serve millions of men and women.

LINKS

UNFPA: No woman should die giving life.

<http://www.unfpa.org/safemotherhood>

Family planning: so that every pregnancy is wanted.

<http://www.unfpa.org/rh/planning.htm>