**WORLD HEALTH DAY**

***Healthy beginnings, hopeful futures***

**Key messages**

* **We can end preventable maternal and newborn deaths.** WHO is calling for a regionwide reinvigoration of efforts to ensure access to high quality care for women and babies, especially in those countries where most maternal and newborn deaths occur.
* **Beyond survival, critical investment is needed to improve women’s longer-term health and well-being**. Women everywhere need access to health providers who listen to their concerns and meet their needs – including in the months after birth when millions still lack critical support.
* **Better maternal health means improving access to sexual and reproductive health services** so that women can plan their lives and protect their health. Agency and empowerment for women and girls is fundamental for tackling both maternal and newborn deaths and achieving health for all.

**Messages for policymakers**

**Ending preventable deaths**

**Investing in human capital**: In low- and middle-income countries, every $1 invested in maternal and newborn health [is estimated](https://pmnch.who.int/resources/publications/m/item/investing-in-maternal-newborn-and-child-health) to yield around $9 to $20 in return. Evidence shows that spending on maternal and newborn health is an investment in human capital, not a cost, leading to economic development and happier, healthier societies.

**High-impact investments**

**High-quality care during pregnancy**: Around 15% of all pregnant women will develop a potentially life-threatening complication that requires safe and skilled care. High quality antenatal care – including at least eight checks with a skilled health worker and early ultrasound – is critical to detect complications and reduce risks.

**Lifesaving care during birth**: More than half of all maternal deaths are due to direct obstetric causes, with the majority occurring during labour or in the first 24 hours after birth; at least one-third of stillbirths occur during labour and birth. Access to quality care from skilled providers during childbirth is critical, including emergency services where needed to prevent and treat complications like haemorrhage, perform emergency C-sections, or provide blood transfusions.

**Address Indirect Causes**: Pre-existing health conditions underpin nearly a quarter of maternal mortality. It is essential to improve care and prevention of health conditions like noncommunicable diseases anaemias and infections, including HIV/AIDS, that complicate pregnancies and increase risks.

**Immediate Newborn Care**: Newborn deaths account for nearly 50% of deaths among children under the age of 5 globally, resulting in 2.4 million lives lost each year. Additionally, almost 2 million babies are stillborn. All babies need essential care at birth and in their first month of life, including breastfeeding support, so they are protected from injury and infection, can breathe normally, and have the vital warmth and nutrition they need to survive and thrive.

**Focus on Midwives:** Midwifery care models, where midwives provide ongoing support to pregnant women and babies after birth, have been shown to improve survival while reducing preterm births and unnecessary medical interventions. Investing in these models, and ensuring sufficient well-trained midwives, is a cost-effective strategy to improve maternal and newborn health.

**Beyond Survival**

**Integrated Postnatal Support**: Around a third of women experience long-term health complications after childbirth, which can increase risks during future pregnancies, with up to 20% of new mothers experiencing postpartum depression or anxiety. An integrated approach to postnatal care connects physical health, mental health, and social support services.

**Family-Friendly Policies**: Family-friendly policies and laws are critical to ensure women have the right support to take care of their health and their babies, including paid maternity leave (at least 18 weeks, ideally 6 months or more), legal protections, and accommodations for breastfeeding.

**Access to Family Planning**: Approximately 218 million women of reproductive age in low- and middle-income countries have an unmet need for modern contraception. Addressing this need can significantly reduce unintended pregnancies and related risk.

**Messages for pregnant women**

**During pregnancy**

**Seeking Care:** WHO recommends at least eight checks with a health professional, starting as soon as you know you are pregnant. These checks monitor your health, and your baby's development, and detect possible complications.

**Important Tests**: Expect tests like ultrasound screenings, urine tests, blood tests, blood pressure checks, glucose screening, and monitoring of your baby’s growth. These are crucial even if you feel healthy, since not all conditions result in obvious symptoms.

**Staying Healthy**: Reduce risks by attending all antenatal appointments and maintaining a healthy lifestyle:

* Avoid tobacco and substance use
* Stay physically active
* Get vaccinated as recommended
* Sleep on your side
* Manage existing health conditions with medical advice
* Seek help if you have concerns

**Warning Signs**: Seek immediate care if you experience: Vaginal bleeding; Severe abdominal pain; Blurred vision, sudden swelling, or persistent headache; Changes in baby's movements; Abdominal injuries. These are not always signs of something serious but it is always best to get them checked.

**Baby Movements**: You can normally start to feel your baby moving between 16-24 weeks of pregnancy. Seek emergency care if movements decrease, stop, or become suddenly intense. Do not rely on home monitoring kits to check a baby’s heartbeat, because they will not reliably indicate all potential problems.

### After Birth

After pregnancy, we undergo many physical and emotional changes, which can be frightening or disconcerting. It can help to know what to expect after birth:

* **Physical Recovery**: Many women experience bleeding, cramping, and discomfort, as well as fatigue. Pain relief can help. Rest when you can, don’t try and do too much in the first weeks, and ask for support as you adjust to caring for your newborn.
* **Emotional Changes**: Feeling a range of emotions, including sadness, is common in the days after birth. This is due to hormonal changes. If these feelings become especially intense and/or persist beyond two weeks, seek advice.
* **Bonding with Your Baby**: Spend time skin-to-skin to promote bonding and regulate your baby's temperature and heart rate.
* **Postnatal Check-ups**: Attend all postnatal appointments to monitor recovery and address concerns.
* **Warning Signs**: Seek immediate help if you experience: heavy bleeding or large clots; red or swollen legs; persistent headache; high fever or vomiting; non-healing wounds, chest pain, difficulty breathing, or seizures

**Mental Health**: Seek advice if you feel extremely sad or anxious. Up to 1 in 5 women experience **postnatal depression or anxiety**. These conditions are common and treatable with professional support. Rarer but extremely serious if not treated, **postpartum psychosis** can occur suddenly with symptoms like hallucinations, delusions, and rapidly changing mood. This is a medical

**Messages for parents and caregivers**

**Caring for a newborn**

Life with a new baby can be a uniquely challenging and emotional time. Here’s some key advice to support a healthy future for your little one.

* **Attend Health Check-ups**: Schedule and attend all recommended newborn care appointments to monitor your baby's growth and development. These visits are crucial for early detection of any health issues.
* **Breastfeeding**: Breastfeeding is highly beneficial for your baby, providing essential nutrients and antibodies. If breastfeeding is challenging, a trained provider can help resolve many common problems.
* **Bonding and Interaction**: Spend time holding, talking to, and playing with your baby. Skin-to-skin contact and responsive interactions help with bonding and support your baby's emotional and cognitive development.
* **Look after Your Own Health**: When all eyes are on the baby, it can be important to lose sight of your own health needs. But taking care of your own health helps protect you and your baby. Take time to rest, ask for support it if you need it, and reach out for medical help if you find you are feeling extremely overwhelmed, sad or anxious.

**Warning Signs:** Seek urgent care for your newborn baby if they have; a fever; a rash that comes on quickly and looks like bruises or bleeding under the skin or does not fade when you put a glass on it; seizures, are floppy or difficult to wake; difficulties breathing (they may be grunting or their tummy is sucking in when they breathe); vomiting persistently or not keeping liquids down for several hours; diarrhoea, especially if it is bloody or accompanied by a fever, dehydration signs (fewer wet diapers, dry mouth, sunken soft spot on the head).