



# Maternal Mortality

Causes and Prevention

## What is maternal mortality?



Maternal mortality refers to the deaths of women due to complications arising from pregnancy or during childbirth.

It can happen while a woman is pregnant, during labor and delivery, or in the 42 days after childbirth or the termination of a pregnancy.

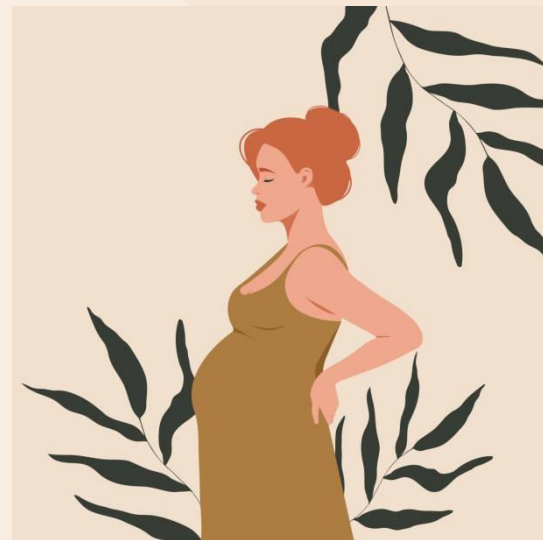
The risk of maternal mortality is highest for adolescent girls **under 15** years old and complications in pregnancy and childbirth are higher among adolescent girls aged **10-19** compared to women aged **20-24**.

## Maternal mortality in numbers

The World Health Organization has reported that every day approximately **810** women died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, **99%** of these maternal deaths occurring in developing countries.

Within this period it was reported that Sub-Saharan Africa suffered from the highest maternal mortality ratio – **533 maternal deaths** per **100,000 live births**, or **200,000 maternal deaths** a year – **68%** of all maternal deaths per year globally.

The vast majority of these deaths - **94%** - occurred in low-resource settings and most could have been prevented.



## Maternal mortality is preventable

Most maternal deaths are preventable, as the health-care solutions to prevent or manage complications are well known - all women need is access to high-quality care during pregnancy and after childbirth.

It is particularly important that all births are attended to by skilled health professionals, as timely management and treatment can make the difference between life and death for the mother as well as for the baby.



- **Severe bleeding** after birth can kill a healthy woman within hours if she is not promptly attended to.
- **Infections** after childbirth can be eliminated if good hygiene is practiced and if early signs of infection are recognized and treated in a timely manner.
- **Pre-eclampsia** should be detected and appropriately managed before the onset of convulsions (eclampsia) and other life-threatening complications.
- It is also vital to prevent **unwanted pregnancies**. All women, including adolescents, also need access to contraception, safe abortion services to the full extent of the law, and quality post-abortion care.

## Why is maternal mortality higher across Africa?

Maternal deaths have declined worldwide over the past two decades and are down by more than a third due to affordable, quality health care services.

Reducing maternal mortality rates in Africa however remains problematic due to a number of ever-present factors:

- i. There is a low density of health professionals and healthcare providers across Africa – **5 health professionals** and **10 hospitals** for every **100,000** Africans
- ii. Many women who experience maternal death in sub-Saharan Africa also live in poverty and cannot afford the healthcare they need to address arising complications.
- iii. A continued lack of awareness and the ever-present issue of cultural beliefs and practices



# The SDGs and Maternal Mortality



Maternal mortality presently forms part of the SDGs (**3.1**) –

**Global Target** - To reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than **70** per 100,000 live births by 2030

**National Targets** - Countries to reduce their maternal mortality rates by at least **two-thirds** from their 2010 baseline with countries with the highest maternal mortality burdens needing to achieve even greater reductions

On its part, the WHO is presently developing the “**Regional Accelerated Plan of Action to end all preventable maternal mortality due to Postpartum Hemorrhage and Pre-eclampsia/Eclampsia**”.

In addition, it is also updating the **2012 Regional Agenda for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)**, a strategic document aimed to ensure universal access to proven effective and quality SRHR services using the most effective and appropriate delivery systems.

To improve maternal health, barriers that limit access to quality maternal health services must be identified and addressed at both the health system and societal levels.

Maternal deaths can lead to the long-term social and economic breakdown of a mother's immediate family and the wider community in developing countries – **this can be prevented!**

Maternal and child health organizations such as WHO, USAID, UNICEF, UNFPA and many others are bringing awareness to this issue, developing programs to help fight maternal mortality and make the future better for all women.

Continued advocacy and multi-stakeholder discussions are encouraged regionally and globally.

## **References**

[World Health Organisation](#)

[World Health Organisation – Africa](#)

[UNICEF](#)

