

PRESS RELEASE

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Family Planning Saves Lives of Millions of Women and Children Every Year

How Many More Lives Could Be Saved?

Family planning is a lifesaver for millions of women and children in developing countries according to a new report by the private, nonprofit Population Reference Bureau (PRB), released March 16, 2009, in Washington, D.C.

“Recent research is shedding light on how family planning increases survival, improves the health of women and children, and helps achieve national goals,” says Rhonda Smith, co-author of *Family Planning Saves Lives*. “The latest estimates indicate that family planning could prevent more than 2 million children’s deaths annually and up to one-third of all maternal deaths.” Maternal deaths occur at the rate of more than one a minute worldwide.

“Family planning forms a safety net for millions of vulnerable women and their children,” adds Jay Gribble, co-author and vice president of International Programs at PRB. “It permits the healthy spacing of births, prevents the spread of HIV, reduces the number of low birth-weight babies, allows for longer breastfeeding, prevents unplanned pregnancies and abortions, and averts deaths from childbirth that leave infants and their siblings motherless and poorly cared for.”

The widespread adoption of family planning represents one of the most dramatic changes of the 20th century. The growing use of contraception around the world has given couples the ability to choose the number and spacing of their children and has had tremendous lifesaving benefits. Yet despite these impressive gains, contraceptive use is still low and the need for contraception is high in some of the world’s poorest and most populous places. An estimated 135 million women have an unmet need for family planning—they are not using any method, but report that they want to avoid becoming pregnant.

Long considered a “best buy” among health investments, family planning is even more important in today’s financially strapped environment. As countries grapple with recession and search for better ways to stretch limited budgets, family planning stands out as one of the most cost-effective, high-yield interventions available. At an average supply cost of US\$1.55 per user annually, it offers a safe, affordable, and effective way for governments to reduce maternal and child illness and deaths, as well as reduce national health expenditures on reproductive and children’s health problems. At the household level, smaller well-spaced families mean that families can stretch their budgets further, by having fewer children to feed, clothe, and educate.

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This edition of *Family Planning Saves Lives* presents updated findings on the crucial role of family planning in improving the health of women, children, and adolescents around the world. It includes new information on how family planning reduces the rate of new HIV infections and deaths from AIDS as well as a “Special Focus” section on the challenges of reenergizing family planning in sub-Saharan Africa, where programs have languished in many countries over the last decade. This “lost decade” has had devastating results: Sub-Saharan Africa continues to grapple with the highest fertility levels in the world (5.4 children per woman); the highest maternal death rates in the world (a woman’s lifetime chance of dying from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes is 1 in 22); and, in Africa as a whole, the highest child death rates—4.8 million children annually. Family planning could prevent many of these deaths—particularly in the poorest countries—by helping women space births, bear children in their healthiest years, and have their desired number of children.

Family Planning Saves Lives is available at www.prb.org/Reports/2009/fpsl.aspx. Also available is an audiocast interview with the report’s lead author, Rhonda Smith.

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