



SAVING CHILDREN'S LIVES

Family planning and reproductive health programs make important contributions to child survival. More than 11 million children under age five die every year in the developing world, many due to births that are too close together, too early or too late in a woman's life. Family planning could prevent 25 percent of these deaths—about three million children's lives a year—by helping women to space births at least two years apart, and to bear children during their healthiest reproductive years.

HERE ARE THE FACTS:

- Infant mortality is higher in countries where women and men do not have access to family planning services. In the United States, where more than two-thirds of women aged 15-49 use modern methods of contraception, infant mortality is relatively low—seven infants out of every 1,000 die in their first year. In Malawi, where only 14 percent of women use modern contraception, more than 1 infant in every 10 dies.
- When women have the ability to space their births, their bodies can recover from nutritional depletion, blood loss and reproductive-system damage, allowing them to have healthier babies. Babies born less than two years after their sibling are more likely to have lower birth weights and are more vulnerable to infection. In addition, their mothers may discontinue breastfeeding an older sibling, putting that child at risk because breastfeeding helps boost the immune system and prevent diarrheal and respiratory infections.
- Allowing women to limit childbearing to their healthiest years also saves children's lives. Currently, more than 40 percent of all teenage girls in the developing world will give birth, yet postponing pregnancy until after the age of 20 decreases the health risks to both mother and child. Babies born to teenagers are more likely to die before their first birthday because they are more likely to be premature, have low birth weights and are more likely to suffer complications from delivery. Young mothers are also less likely to receive prenatal care, and they often do not have the economic and social resources to protect the health of their children.
- In addition to affecting the health of infants, family planning programs also contribute to children's well-being by protecting the health of their mothers. Nearly 600,000 women die each year from pregnancy-related causes. Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death and disability for women in developing countries aged 15 to 49. An estimated 90 percent of infants whose mothers die at childbirth will not survive to their first birthday.

Resources: John Hopkins University Center for Communications Programs, *Why Family Planning Matters*, Population Reports, Series J, No. 49, Baltimore, MD, July 1999 (www.jhuccp.org/pr/49edsum.stm); Population Reference Bureau, *Breastfeeding Patterns in the Developing World*, Washington, DC, July 1999 (www.prb.org/pubs/bfwc99.htm); Population Reference Bureau, *Family Planning Saves Lives*, Third Edition, Washington, DC, December 1996 (www.prb.org/pubs/pdf/fpslafen.pdf); Save the Children, *State of the World's Mothers 2000*, Westport, CT, May 2000 (www.savethechildren.org/worldsmothers00/contents.html).