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# Promoting Family Planning

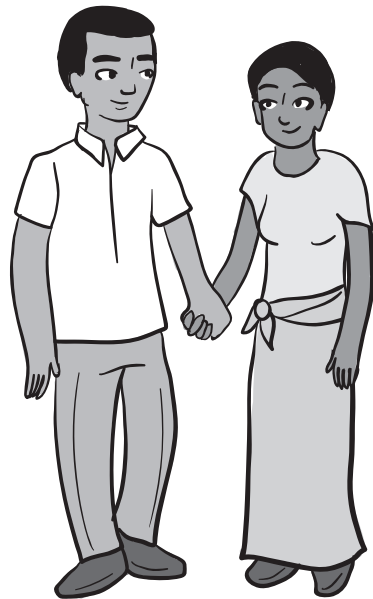
## INTRODUCTION

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Voluntary family planning has been widely adopted throughout the world. More than half of all couples in the developing world now use a modern method of contraception for healthy timing, spacing, and limiting of births to achieve their desired family size. Few other public health measures have demonstrated so great a life-saving, health, and economic impact for such a low cost. Family planning has saved the lives of millions of mothers and their children and has improved the well-being of families and communities.

The success of family planning has not been consistent across countries or even within countries. In some countries, the level of contraceptive use has remained low or risen slowly over the years. Even in countries where modern-method use is relatively widespread, there are populations without access to family planning services. In the developing world, an estimated 222 million women would like to space or limit their pregnancies but are not using a contraceptive method. South Asia has the highest number of women who want to avoid pregnancy and are not using a family planning method. Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest proportion of women who fall in this category. The United Nations estimates that the desire to use family

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- 1 Family planning saves the lives of women, newborns, children, and teenage girls.
- 2 Family planning lowers the number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.
- 3 Family planning benefits families and communities.
- 4 Family planning benefits nations by enabling increased public spending per person in all sectors.
- 5 Family planning reduces the burden on natural resources and the environment.

planning will grow by 40% by 2050, as record numbers of young people enter their childbearing years.

There are some women — and couples — who have access to family planning services and would like to use contraception but do not. These women say that the main reasons for not using contraceptives are side effects, infrequent sex, fear of their partner's disapproval, and religious beliefs that do not support family planning. These concerns can be addressed by trusted persons, such as health workers, religious leaders, friends, and journalists, who communicate key information effectively.

Providing accurate and reassuring information to women and couples about family planning is an essential component of family planning promotion and advocacy. Those who do so do a great service to women, their families, and the community. Effectively promoting family planning will help people to start using contraception and motivate them to continue. This will improve their health and the health of their children. In turn, communities and nations will benefit from stronger, healthier, more productive citizens who can better care for themselves, educate their children, and put less strain on limited resources.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### FACT 1.

#### Family planning saves the lives of women, newborns, children, and teenage girls.

Family planning can significantly reduce the risk of maternal, newborn, infant, and child illness and death by preventing a high-risk pregnancy in women with certain health conditions or characteristics, or by preventing an unplanned pregnancy. Women typically welcome pregnancy and childbirth,

especially when planned. However, many pregnancies are unintended or mistimed, and the risk of illness and death associated with these events can be very high.

#### THE HEALTHIEST TIMES FOR A WOMAN TO BECOME PREGNANT ARE:

- Between the ages of 18 and 34.
- At least 24 months after a live birth.
- At least 6 months after a miscarriage.

Access to family planning information and services prevents unnecessary maternal death or illness due to an unintended pregnancy. There are more than 287,000 maternal deaths a year.

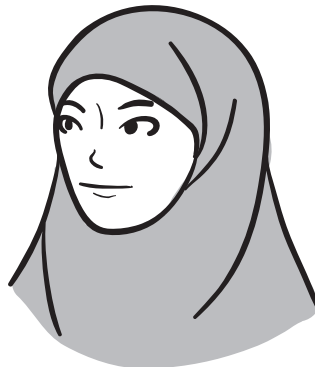
For every maternal death, at least 30 other women suffer serious illness or debilitating injuries, such as severe anemia, damage to the reproductive organs or nervous system, chronic pain, infertility, and the inability to control the leakage of urine. If women had only the number of pregnancies that they wanted, maternal mortality would drop by about one-third. In spite of this, about 222 million women in the developing world who want to avoid a pregnancy are not using a modern contraceptive method.

Health risks associated with childbirth are higher to the mother when she is among those under age 18 or older than age 34. Also, women with five or more children are 1.5 to 3 times more likely to die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth than women with two or three children. Women with more than three children are more likely to suffer from anemia, require blood transfusions during delivery, and die of bleeding than are women with fewer children.

Family planning also saves the lives of newborns and children. About one-third of all infant deaths occur because mothers had births too close together or were too young. Babies born to women under the age of 18 are more likely to be born before reaching full term, to have a low birth weight, and to have problems during birth that could lead to death of the baby or the mother. Family planning helps women delay their first pregnancy until the age of 18 years or older.

After a live birth, family planning helps a woman space her next pregnancy for at least the recommended two years (approximately three years between births). With such spacing, children are more than twice as likely to survive infancy and are healthier. The time between pregnancies also allows the mother to provide the benefits of breastfeeding longer and spend more time with each child. This contributes to the child's physical health and mental and emotional development.

Family planning can also save teenage girls' lives by helping them to delay the first pregnancy. If they become pregnant, girls ages 10 to 14 are five times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than women ages 20 to 24. Marriage by girls before the



age of 18 is considered normal in many countries, even though it is against international standards and many national laws. In Ethiopia, for example, half of the girls are married by the age of 18, and one of every four girls is married by the age of 15.

Globally, it is estimated that nearly 10 million adolescent girls marry each year. These young brides are pressured to begin having children even though they are not fully physically developed and their bodies are not prepared for pregnancy. Many young girls marry older men, putting them at higher risk of being infected by their husbands with sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Parents and the community should protect these girls by supporting healthy timing of pregnancies and by providing the girls with information and counseling. This support may help them to negotiate, if possible, delaying their first pregnancy until they are at least 18 years old.

Many unmarried girls run the risk of becoming pregnant if they are sexually active. While sexual activity of unmarried girls may not be socially accepted, providing contraception to these young women may save their lives. In addition, delaying pregnancy will allow these young women to complete their education, prepare to join the paid workforce, and contribute to the household income.

## **FACT 2.**

### **Family planning lowers the number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.**

Each year there are an estimated 80 million unintended pregnancies, and 42 million of these pregnancies end in abortion. The primary reason for abortion is to end an unplanned pregnancy. To reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and thus the number of abortions, women must

have access to contraceptive information and services. Studies around the world have found that, where women received high-quality contraceptive services, the number of abortions decreased. These studies demonstrate the essential role of contraceptive services in reducing abortions.

**FACT 3.****Family planning benefits families and communities.**

When couples have only the number of children they want, there are fewer children needing educational and other community services. Healthy children are better able to learn, which puts less strain on teachers and schools. Researchers have shown that personal savings and investments increase when working parents have fewer dependents to support. Family planning results in smaller, healthier families that are better able to care for themselves. The health, education, and public services of communities are less burdened. There are fewer children to immunize and treat. This means health resources can be utilized more efficiently, with less overcrowding in hospitals and at clinics. With fewer children to educate, schools will be less crowded, and teachers will be able to pay more attention to every child. There will be lower demands on clean water, sanitation, transportation, and other public services. By embracing family planning programs, communities strengthen their ability to provide public services and improve the lives of their families.

Family planning is also one of the most cost-effective and powerful strategies to empower women and improve their lives. Women who are empowered to make choices about childbearing are more likely to get better education and job experience, and are more likely to contribute to the economic health of their families and communities.

**FACT 4.****Family planning benefits nations by enabling increased public spending per person in all sectors.**

Governments around the world are focused on combating poverty and achieving a range of health and development goals, such as those outlined in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Family planning contributes to achieving nearly all of these goals. Reducing the number of unplanned births and having smaller families helps to reduce the level of need for public-sector spending in health, water, sanitation, education, and other social services. Preventing unplanned pregnancy among HIV infected women is the most cost-effective way of preventing maternal to child transmission of HIV. Family planning helps nations to reach social and economic goals, beginning at the community level. Family planning is an important and cost-effective investment for governments and contributes to multiple economic and health priorities, including reducing poverty.

**FACT 5.****Family planning reduces the burden on natural resources and the environment.**

Family planning not only has an impact on the health and well-being of families but also contributes to better management and conservation of natural resources and eases population pressure on local ecosystems. The population level in a country has a profound impact on the demands placed on limited natural resources. Rapidly growing populations increase demand for scarce natural resources and put pressure on water, trees, farmland, wildlife, and ecosystems. Smaller families help to protect natural resources and keep them from being overused and destroyed.