



International Safe Abortion Day

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HRP works towards the prevention of unsafe abortion in the context of COVID-19.

During the current pandemic, International Safe Abortion Day is a timely reminder that access to legal and safe abortion is fundamental to every person's right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.

Putting words into action: partnering to prevent unsafe abortion

HRP (the UNDP/UNFPA/UNICEF/WHO/World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction) is collaborating with several partners to prevent unsafe abortion and support women's and girls' health, well-being and rights in the context of COVID-19; partners include DKT International, Ipas, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Marie Stopes International, Pathfinder International, PSI and other organisations that are committed to preventing unsafe abortion and the devastating range of health risks it can lead to.

“Sexual and reproductive health commodities and services are already limited in many settings and are becoming more difficult to access during COVID-19. It is important that we combine our efforts,” explained Dr. Bela Ganatra, Prevention of Unsafe Abortion Unit Head at HRP and the WHO Department of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research.

“Access to modern contraception and comprehensive abortion care are crucial to avoid an increase in unintended pregnancies and subsequent unsafe abortions. Stronger partnerships at the global, regional and country level promote successful strategies for ensuring these essential health services and human rights.”

Such collaborative efforts aim to support effective responses to sexual and reproductive health needs with a focus on service delivery and supply chain across four key areas:

- **Adaptations and indicators: identifying successful approaches for maintaining and scaling safe abortion services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Guidelines and recommendations: reviewing existing and new resources to avoid duplication of guidelines across partners**
- **Mitigation strategies: assessing where and what measures are needed to reduce disruption in access to safe abortion services and supplies**
- **Procurement and funding: reviewing the impact of funding gaps on service delivery and availability of medical abortion**

Disruption to sexual and reproductive health services puts lives at risk

Every year almost half of all pregnancies - 121 million - are unintended. This calls for the strengthening of contraceptive services and access to comprehensive abortion care. Since abortion services are time-bound by gestational and legal limits, women and adolescents seeking an abortion often resort to unsafe abortion when they cannot access safe abortion.

Postponing abortion care during COVID-19 may therefore lead to increased morbidity and mortality.

All individuals who can become pregnant and who seek medical abortion care – women, girls and those with varying gender identities – should be provided with the necessary information to make an informed decision about their reproductive health, rights, bodies and futures.

The WHO guidance, Maintaining essential health services: operational guidance for the COVID-19 context recommends that countries should ensure ongoing access to contraception services, as well as to safe abortion to the full extent allowed by law throughout the pandemic.

Telemedicine and an opportunity for leaving no one behind

Abortions are safe when carried out with a WHO-recommended method that is appropriate to the pregnancy duration, and by a person who has the necessary skills. Unfortunately, the most recent available estimates show that around 45% of all abortions globally were unsafe.

Among the many barriers that limit access to safe abortion care, the lack of skilled providers is one of the most critical: in many countries, women in rural areas and those who are dependent on the public sector are especially affected.

Telemedicine, which has been promoted to support delivery of health services during COVID-19, may be a long-term opportunity to safeguard every person's sexual and reproductive health and well-being far into the future.

Evidence has demonstrated that when medicines are made available alongside a source of accurate information and access to a health-care provider if needed or wanted at any stage of the process, self-medication can offer crucial support in providing access to safe abortion care.

“Eliminating unsafe abortion is one of the key components of the WHO Global reproductive health strategy.” explained Ian Askew, Director of HRP and the WHO Department of SRH.

“COVID-19 is teaching us so many lessons about digital health, self-management and opportunities for better service delivery to achieve this - now, in future, and in future healthcare emergencies.”

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