New WHO tool helps guide contraception choices following childbirth - WHO's new digital resource synthesises guidance on postpartum family planning

26 January 2016 | NUSA DUA, INDONESIA - Postpartum women are among those with the greatest unmet need for family planning, yet they often do not receive the services they need to support longer birth intervals or reduce unintended pregnancies and their consequences. Postpartum women are those who have given birth in the previous 0-11 months. Analysis of data from 57 countries in 2005-2013 estimates 32 - 62% of postpartum women had an unmet need for family planning.¹

While it is possible for a woman to become pregnant soon after childbirth (after 4 weeks for women who are not breastfeeding) little user-friendly guidance has existed to help women make safe and informed choices about their contraceptive choices in the postpartum period.

To address this need, WHO developed a new digital tool to help women access safe contraceptive options in the immediate or extended postpartum period, whether or not they are breastfeeding.

The WHO Postpartum Family Planning Compendium, launched today at the International Conference on Family Planning in Nusa Dua, Indonesia, is aimed at health providers who are prescribing contraception to postpartum women and program managers and policy makers who facilitate the availability of contraceptive methods. It focuses on the initiation of family planning services within the first 12 months following childbirth to prevent closely-spaced and unintended pregnancies.

“The new WHO Compendium is the first tool of its kind. Health-care providers will now be able to quickly access the information they need, and be better equipped to give postpartum women guidance on safe contraceptive options,” says Dr Mary Lyn Gaffield, scientist in the Department of Reproductive Health and Research at WHO.

The user-friendly digital platform helps health providers quickly and easily access WHO recommendations on what contraceptive options are available for postpartum women. Synthesising evidence from WHO guidelines, the new Compendium allows people to select from a range of options, including health conditions and drug interactions, to quickly reach as little or as much information they need on postpartum family planning.

Postpartum family planning is important to reinforce women’s rights to determine the number and spacing of their children to avoid the risks of pregnancy and unsafe abortion and to prevent deaths of mothers and children. It prevents unintended pregnancies, including those of women who face increased risk related to pregnancy. Reducing unmet need for family planning has the potential to reduce maternal deaths by 30%, and infant death by 60%, amongst women who have given birth at very closely spaced intervals (less than 24 months).² Evidence suggests that women who have more than four children are at increased risk of maternal mortality.

The new Compendium is accessible for all computers, including mobile devices and tablets, and will in time be translated into a number of languages.

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