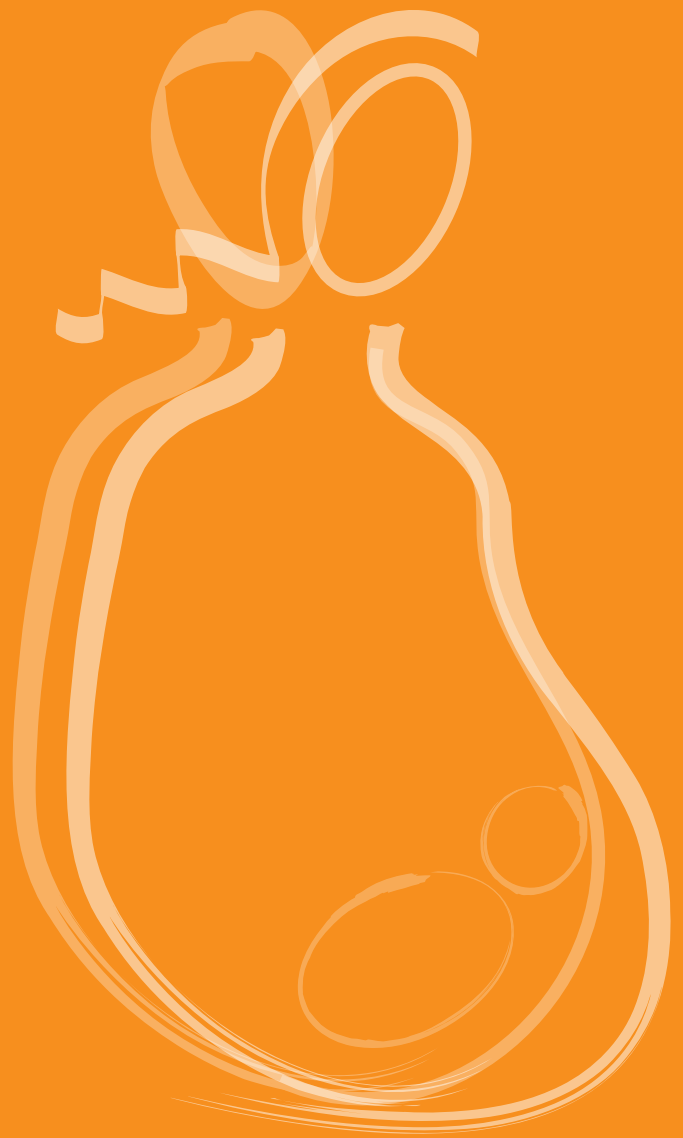


WHO Technical Consultation on Postpartum and Postnatal Care



World Health
Organization

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This document was prepared by Mathai Matthews, von Xylander Severin and Zupan Jelka based on the WHO Technical consultation on postpartum and postnatal care held in Geneva, October 29-31, 2008.

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Department of Making Pregnancy Safer

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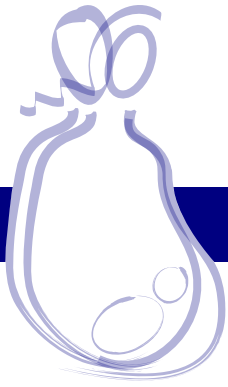
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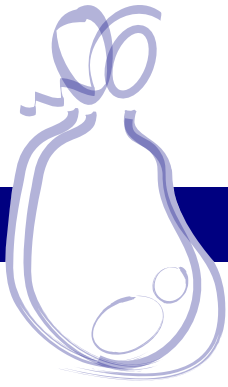
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Preface

The period soon after childbirth poses substantial health risks for both mother and newborn infant. Yet the postpartum and postnatal period receives less attention from health care providers than pregnancy and childbirth. Models of postpartum and postnatal care have changed little since first developed a century ago.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is in the process of revising and updating its guidance on postpartum and postnatal care delivered by skilled providers. The purposes of revision are to encourage and support broader provision of care and to foster a new, woman-centred concept of care that promotes health as well as maintains vigilance against dangerous complications. In October 2008 an expert consultation took place in Geneva to advise WHO on the coverage, form and content for revised and updated guidance. This meeting, which is documented here, prepared for an upcoming technical consultation to develop the guidance itself.



Introduction

The first hours, days and weeks after childbirth are a dangerous time for both mother and newborn infant. Among the more than 500 000 women who die each year due to complications of pregnancy and childbirth (1), most deaths occur during or immediately after childbirth (2). Every year three million infants die in the first week of life, and another 900 000 die in the next three weeks (3).

Bleeding and infection following childbirth account for many maternal deaths (4), while preterm birth, asphyxia and severe infections contribute to two thirds of all neonatal deaths (5). Appropriate care in the first hours and days after childbirth could prevent the great majority of these deaths. Thus, it has been recommended that skilled health professionals attend all births, to assure the best possible outcome for both mother and newborn infant (6). A large proportion of women continue to lack such care, however. On average, skilled birth attendants cover 66% of births worldwide, and some parts of Africa and Asia have much lower coverage rates (7). The fact that two thirds of maternal and newborn deaths occur in the first two days after birth (5,8) testifies to the inadequacy of care.

Care in the period following birth is critical not only for survival but also to the future of mothers and newborn babies. Major changes occur during this period that determine their well-being and potential for a healthy future.

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