

Adolescent girls are particularly at risk for poor health when they are going through puberty and start menstruating. Many have an inadequate understanding of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and many face sexual and gender-based violence.

Early pregnancy and motherhood present additional risks: complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for adolescent girls in developing countries.²⁴ Exposure to sexually transmitted infections is another cause for concern. HIV is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age in lower- and middle-income countries. In the hardest-hit countries, girls account for 80 percent of new HIV cases.

Moreover, women living with HIV are four to five times more likely to develop cervical cancer. Gender inequality greatly influences survival rates, since women who do not have equal access to health care have a 40-percent greater risk of dying from cervical cancer.



Women are more prone to nutritional deficiencies, especially when they are pregnant, breastfeeding or experiencing their adolescent growth spurt.²⁵ Gender-based discrimination in some societies

means that women and girls eat least and eat last. As a result, they are twice as likely to suffer malnutrition as men and boys.²⁶

Of the 5.9 million child deaths in 2015, nearly 45 percent were linked to malnutrition.²⁷ Children in sub-Saharan Africa are 14 times more likely to die before they reach the age of five than are children in developed countries.²⁸ Poor nutrition among pregnant women accounts for 800,000 newborn deaths annually.²⁹

KEY FACTS

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

- ▶ About 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 and 1 million girls under age 15 give birth every year—95 percent of them in developing countries.³⁰
- ▶ 99 percent of maternal deaths occur in developing countries.³¹
- ▶ 225 million women worldwide do not have access to contraception. If they did, 52 million unintended pregnancies could be prevented each year.³²
- ▶ Every year, some 3 million girls aged 15 to 19 undergo unsafe abortions.³³
- ▶ Smaller families make it easier for women to participate in the workforce, which provides financial support and guards against poverty. For every additional child born to women aged 25 to 39, labour participation drops by 10 to 15 percent.
- ▶ In sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise 56 percent of new cases of HIV/AIDS infections among adults (15 and older), and the proportion is higher among young women aged 15 to 24.³⁴
- ▶ HIV prevalence among young women (aged 15 to 24) is more than twice as high as young men in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁵
- ▶ Cervical cancer kills more than 260,000 women worldwide each year; of those deaths, nearly 90 percent are in developing countries.
- ▶ 60 percent of the world's 800 million undernourished people are women and girls.³⁶