

WHO cuts global estimate for maternal deaths

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(AP) -- The World Health Organization said Wednesday that fewer women die each year from complications during pregnancy and childbirth than previously estimated, but efforts to sharply cut maternal mortality by 2015 are still off track.

A new WHO report found that 358,000 women died during pregnancy or childbirth in 2008, mostly in poor countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

As recently as April the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, a global alliance hosted by the [World Health Organization](#), had estimated that maternal deaths worldwide could still be as high as 500,000.

The latest figure shows a drop of about one third compared with 546,000 deaths in 1990, the global body said.

Dr. Flavia Bustreo, director of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, said researchers had revised their earlier estimates after closer scrutiny of figures provided by WHO member states.

"All of these numbers are bound with a lot of uncertainty," she said, noting that in many developing countries births and deaths aren't officially recorded, meaning reliable figures are difficult to come by.

About 57 percent of maternal deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and 30

percent in South Asia. Five percent of [maternal deaths](#) happen in rich countries, WHO said.

Women in developing countries are 36 times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause during their lifetime than their counterparts in [developed countries](#).

WHO warned in its report that improvements to maternal health are too slow to meet the global body's goal of cutting deaths during pregnancy and childbirth by three quarters between 1990 and 2015.

"No woman should die due to inadequate access to family planning and to pregnancy and delivery care," said WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan.

More information: <http://www.who.int>

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