

# WHO warns of Caesarean 'epidemic'

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Credit: Anna Langova/public domain

The UN's World Health Organization on Friday warned that too many women in developing and wealthy countries alike are resorting unnecessarily to Caesarean sections to give birth.

Other [pregnant women](#) with a real medical need for a C-section simply do not have access to the operation, the WHO added.

"In a lot of developing and developed countries, there is really an

epidemic of Caesarean sections, even when there is no medical need," said Marleen Temmerman, director of the WHO's reproductive health department.

In countries like Brazil, where some 53 percent of births are by C-section according to WHO figures, "there is a culture of 'let's go for Caesarean'," Temmerman added.

Since the mid-1980s, doctors have said the ideal rate of C-sections should range between 10 and 15 percent, though the health community is working on establishing a new recommendation.

"If a country... has a rate that is below 10 percent, you can see that there are more mothers and babies dying because (there is) no access," Temmerman said.

"We see women dying" in some countries because they cannot be operated on in time, she added.

According to the WHO's 2008 figures, some 23 percent of births in Europe were by C-section, 35 percent in North and South America, and 24 percent in the Western Pacific.

Only Africa and southeast Asia, with rates of 3.8 and 8.8 percent, appeared to be free from the "epidemic".

Friday's recommendations were the first specific call by the WHO to stop childbirth by Caesarean except when it is medically necessary.

"I think this is the first time we are being so explicit about it," said WHO perinatal expert Metin Gulmezoglu.

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