

Community Education Fact Sheet: Preventing postpartum hemorrhage

Preparing for the upcoming birth of a baby

Preparing for birth with a skilled birth attendant:

- Make plans to give birth with a skilled birth attendant
- Decide birth plan issues
- Prepare what is needed for birth
- Save money

Preparing in case of a complication:

- Learn about danger signs before, during and after childbirth
- Establish a savings plan/scheme
- Make a plan for decision-making in case an emergency occurs while the primary decision-maker is away.
- Arrange in advance for transportation in case of emergency
- Arrange for a blood donor in case of need

Helping to prevent problems during and after childbirth

Every woman in labour deserves special attention, because although most labours and deliveries progress normally, there is always a risk of something going wrong. Many dangers can be avoided if the woman goes to a skilled birth attendant when she first thinks she is in labour. Having a skilled birth attendant assist during childbirth and check on the woman and newborn in the first 12 hours after childbirth reduces the chance of either the woman or the baby becoming ill or dying.

Who is a skilled birth attendant?

A skilled attendant is a community midwife, nurse, midwife, or doctor who can:

- Take care of women having normal (uncomplicated) pregnancies and childbirth.
- Take care of the woman and newborn after childbirth, and
- Identify, treat, and/or refer the woman and newborn for any problems they may have.

Community health workers (such as TBAs) who have not had formal education in caring for women during pregnancy, labor and childbirth (including identifying and treating complications) are not considered skilled birth attendants.

How will giving birth with a skilled provider prevent problems and reduce the chance that women will lose too much blood after giving birth?

During and immediately after childbirth, the skilled birth attendant knows:

- When medical help is required and how to obtain it.
- What care to give if the woman or baby has a problem.
- When labour has gone on for too long and when a move to a hospital is necessary.
- If treatment or injections / tablets are necessary to speed labor up;
- What to do during labour, childbirth, and after the baby is born to prevent the woman from losing too much blood.
- How to deliver the afterbirth (placenta) safely – she / he will give the woman an injection or a tablet immediately after birth of the baby that will help the afterbirth separate from the womb (uterus) and then deliver the afterbirth.
- How to massage the woman's womb immediately after the afterbirth is delivered and to teach the woman how to do this herself.
- How to check the woman for vaginal bleeding after birth.

How can women and their partners / families help to prevent bleeding too much after giving birth?

Women and their families can do the following to help the woman have a safe pregnancy and birth and bring a healthy newborn into the world:

- Regularly seek antenatal care and take preventive measures against anaemia and malaria.
- Prepare for birth and in case of complications.
- Go to or call the skilled birth attendant as soon as labour starts or the waters break, whichever comes first.
- Do not take any tablets / herbal remedies to speed labour up.
- Give birth with a skilled birth attendant.



Community Education Fact Sheet: What is postpartum hemorrhage?

What is postpartum hemorrhage?

It is normal to have some bleeding when you give birth. Your bleeding is heavy if you lose half a liter (2 meters of cotton cloth) or more of blood. Heavy bleeding after childbirth is called **postpartum hemorrhage**. If you lose about one liter (4 *kangas*) or more of blood after childbirth, then you have **severe postpartum hemorrhage**.

Heavy bleeding (hemorrhage) can happen any time up to six weeks after giving birth:

Why is bleeding heavily after giving birth a problem?

Bleeding heavily after having a baby is a problem because:

- It can lead to anemia (when you have a low number of red blood cells in your body. Red blood cells are needed to get oxygen to your body).
- You may need a blood transfusion (someone will need to donate blood to replace what you have lost).
- You can die. But **this is rare**.

What causes bleeding heavily after giving birth?

Most women who bleed heavily after they've had a baby do so because their womb (uterus) doesn't shrink (contract) properly. As your womb contracts and separates from your placenta (afterbirth), the blood vessels in your womb close up. If your womb does not contract, then the blood vessels will not close up and you will bleed.

If some of the placenta doesn't come away completely, the womb can't contract properly and the blood vessels will continue bleeding.

Other problems that also can cause heavy bleeding after childbirth are:

- Bits of the placenta getting stuck in your womb after delivery, instead of coming out
- Cuts or tears around your vagina or cervix (the opening of the womb) during delivery
- A hole or tear in your womb
- Your blood not clotting normally.

What can you do if you bleed heavily after giving birth?

If you think you are bleeding heavily and you feel dizzy and weak, **immediately go for help**. You can lose a lot of blood very quickly and need treatment as soon as possible to save your life. While you are waiting to get to help, you should:

- Make sure your **bladder is empty**. If your bladder is full it can prevent the uterus from contracting.
- **Breastfeed** your baby, if you have chosen to do so. If you are not breastfeeding, then rub your nipples between your fingers to stimulate them. When the nipples are stimulated, a natural substance called oxytocin is produced that helps the uterus contract.
- **Rub up your uterus** until it feels hard. If your uterus stays soft in spite of massage, then someone can compress it externally between two hands to constrict uterine blood vessels and stop bleeding.
- If you are bleeding from a tear in your birth canal, someone should **put a clean cloth on the tear and apply pressure** until bleeding has stopped or you have reached the health care facility.
- If your placenta has not delivered, try squatting and push with a contraction. If this does not work, you need to get help immediately.

A woman is bleeding too much after giving birth if she has:

- soaked 2 or more *kangas* (2 meters of cotton cloth).
- fast bleeding that is not decreasing after birth (soaks 2 or more pads in less than 30 minutes).
- clots the size of lemons or bigger.
- slow, continuous bleeding that does not stop.

Any time a woman is bleeding and gets faint or feels dizzy, she has bled too much and needs immediate attention.