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## National Safe Motherhood Day (India): April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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The problem of pregnancy related deaths has been a public health issue since centuries. It is a dark fact that Mumtaz Mahal, the queen of Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan's died due to childbirth related complications. Even today, after 388 long years, there are thousands of women in the country who continue to die during childbirth.

One woman somewhere across the globe dies due to pregnancy related complications every single minute. A maternal death occurs in India every seven minutes leading to more than seventy seven thousand pregnancy related deaths each year. The disappointment lies in the fact that majority of these incidents are preventable. It is every woman's right to live and survive pregnancy and childbirth.

The White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood is an alliance of organizations working together to increase awareness, build partnerships and act as a stimulus for action in order to decrease maternal mortality significantly. It was launched in India by Centre for Development and Population Activities 1999 and with a coalition of 1800 organizations, in 2003, it requested the Government of India to declare April 11<sup>th</sup>, Kasturba Gandhi's birth anniversary, as National Safe Motherhood Day. India is the world's first country to have officially declared a National Safe Motherhood Day. Every year a nationwide advocacy theme is selected for Safe Motherhood Day, and activities and full-scale campaigns are carried out throughout the country to increase awareness on proper healthcare and maternity facilities to pregnant and lactating mothers. Also the members, state associations and non-profit organisations come together on National Safe Motherhood Day to share technical skills, expertise and resources.<sup>1</sup>

This day also helps to generate awareness about the institutional deliveries, anemia reduction among females and improvement in pre and post-natal health care facilities.

According to a recent report, in India, roughly up to 407 mothers die per 100,000 live births. Infant mortality rate is 63 per 1000 births in which 47 % of deaths occur during the first week of life.<sup>2</sup>

### Safe Motherhood Programme

The aim of the National Safe Motherhood Program is to reduce morbidity and mortality rates of pregnant and lactating mothers and neonates and to improve their health through preventive strategies and activities related to health promotion as well as by addressing avoidable causative factors that can lead to death during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum period. Nutritious snacks, such as vegetables, fruits, egg, yoghurt, cheese, pulses, sprouts, soya and milk products, along with proper hydration are ideal for a pregnant woman. Timely intake of calcium, folate and Omega-3 supplementation everyday are important in shielding mental and physical health of the body.

Mercury abundant foods should be avoided as they are known to affect the renal and nervous system of the foetus and might decrease foetal immunity. Intake of caffeine in any form should be minimised. Bacterial build-up might result due to ingestion of sprouts and unpasteurised milk which can be harmful for the baby. Carbonated drinks should also be avoided.

In recent years, there has been a reduction in India's maternal mortality rate which is primarily due to government interventions like Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakaram scheme started in 2011 to encompass free services for women and children, enhancement of institutional deliveries, a national intensification of emergency referral systems and maternal mortality surveys, and improvements in the administration of health services.

The Indian government is backed by UNICEF at both countrywide and territorial levels to improve



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the quality and utilization of high impact maternal health services with an eye on attempts to address the essential requisites of young mothers who are more prone to complications during pregnancy, child birth and post-delivery periods. In 2013-14, UNICEF assisted the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to instigate a short-term training for midwives and doctors on maternal health using dummies and models along with supporting educational workout for professional birth attendants. UNICEF India reinforces the capacities of healthcare professionals and other involved members to propose, execute, analyse and manage efficacious maternal health care services with an attention on high-risk pregnant women and those from inapproachable communities.<sup>4</sup>

The rate of pregnancy related maternal mortalities can be impeded by reassuring delivery by qualified professional birth attendants, reducing prevalence and incidence of anaemic conditions in young females, educating pregnant women regarding nutrition, providing postnatal care to mothers for pain, infections and excessive haemorrhage, provision of immunization, timely detection and management of birth related complications.

Family planning, antenatal care, obstetric care focussing on clean and safe delivery, prenatal care, postnatal care, control of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infections, equality and education of women can be considered as the pillars of safe motherhood.

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### Cite this article as:

Chawla P. National Safe Motherhood Day (India): April 11th, 2019. Int Healthc Res J. 2019;3(1):1-2. doi: 10.26440/IHRJ/0301.04.521064

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