

## Over-the-Counter Emergency Contraception is Available in Manchester

**W**omen in Manchester, England were able to obtain emergency contraception without a prescription under a government-sponsored pilot programme aiming to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies. The three-month scheme was run by the Manchester, Trafford and Salford Health Action Zone, beginning 24 December last year. Until then, the morning-after pill had only been available by prescription from a General Practitioner (GP) or from a family planning centre. The trial had the backing of the Department of Health, and was to run until the end of March.

A spokesperson for the Health Action Zone told the news agency PA News in January: "Sixteen pharmacies are taking part in the pilot across the area, which has some of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in the country. The pharmacists are supplying the drug, not prescribing it. They have all undergone a very rigorous training. They are taught to ask a series of detailed and complex questions that a woman must answer satisfactorily. If not, she will be refused the drug and advised to contact her GP. Those to whom the drug is given must take it on the premises." He said the 10-minute consultation is carried out in a private area of the pharmacy.

The current emergency contraceptive drug is said to prevent 75 percent of pregnan-

cies if taken within 72 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse.

The pilot scheme was to be evaluated before a decision was made on whether to extend it.

Source: Reprinted from *Pro-Choice Forum*, 11 January 2000

## Women Urged to take Cervical Cancer Tests

**A**bout 150 women die needlessly every year in Hong Kong from cervical cancer, the Hong Kong Cancer Fund said yesterday, launching a campaign to encourage women to take smear tests.

More than two-thirds of women in Hong Kong have never had a pap smear test and many who do have tests do not have them regularly enough.

Cervical cancer was the fourth most common form of cancer in Hong Kong after cancer of the breast, lung and colon, with 500 new cases each year, yet Hong Kong women knew little about the disease, the group said. It urged women to visit its Web site at <http://www.cancer-fund.org> for information.

"Every year 150 women in Hong Kong die needlessly from cervical cancer, yet unlike other cancers, this one is preventable," said fund chairwoman Sally Lo. "A five-minute pap smear test can prevent a woman from getting cervical cancer because the test can detect the change in the cervix cells before the cancer starts."

Pap smears are highly recommended for women from the age of 18. The first two tests should be taken at one-year intervals, with a subsequent test every three years. Women can register their E-mail address on the fund's Website and arrange a date for a test. On the chosen date, they will get an E-mail reminder, as well as the addresses of clinics where they can be tested.

Fashion designer Lucy Shih Hei-yu, 36, said she started to have a regular test 16 years ago when she went to study in London. "They are more there, while people here are still a bit reserved to take that sort of test," Ms. Shih said. "That even includes my mother. I had to push her to take a test this year."

Housewife Yuen Yuk-kuen, 38, said she was reluctant to take a test. "My doctor said it would be painful, so I never took it." But Dr. Alexander Chang, chief of cytopathology at Prince of Wales Hospital, said the procedure should be painless.

Source: *Women's News Digest*, Nos. 48/49, June 2000

## Pregnancy, Childbirth Woes Still Top Killers

By Anne Stephanie Cruz

**C**omplications of pregnancy and childbirth remain the leading cause of death and disability for women aged 15 to 49 in most developing countries, the United Nations Population Fund reported.

The *State of the World's Population* said that of all the health statistics monitored by the World Health Organization, maternal mortality shows the largest discrepancy between developed and developing countries. Women in developing countries are about 30 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than those in developed countries.

The report showed that every day some 1,400 women, or one every minute, die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, with more than 99 percent of those deaths in low and middle income countries. Each year more than 50 million pregnancy-related complications lead to long-term illness or disability.

Only 53 percent of childbirths in developing countries take place with a skilled attendant, doctor, nurse or midwife.

The UN said that better care at childbirth and more access to care, costing about US\$3 a person a year, would substantially reduce maternal mortality.

In Oran, Algeria, after public hospital fees were abolished in the 1970s, the maternal mortality rate fell 42 percent and the number of home childbirths dropped sharply.

"Adequate health care is crucial to safe motherhood. One study found that among members of a religious group in the United States that rejected all medical care, the maternal mortality ratio was 870 of 100,000 live births, as high as the ratios in the poorest countries, although members of the group had incomes incomparable to their neighbors," the UN said.

