

The report noted that chronic diseases and malnutrition leave many women unable to meet the physical demands of pregnancy. Anaemia, often the result of poor nutrition, affects 40 to 80 percent of pregnant women in developing countries, excluding China, more than twice the percentage in developed countries.

Also, a woman's age and the number of previous births affect her chances of dying in childbirth.

The UN reiterates, however, that avoiding unwanted pregnancy saves lives.

During a study in Bangladesh from 1977 to 1985, intensive family planning services were provided in some villages, and the percentage of women using contraceptives rose from eight to 40 percent.

As a result, maternal mortality fell to less than half of that in other nearby villages in the same district—even though there was no change in the risk of dying from any one pregnancy.

Source: *Today*, 26 September 2000

Pill Users, Take Note

More accurate information for pill users could help millions of women avoid unintended pregnancies, according to a new report from the John Hopkins School of Public Health. Forty years after oral contraceptives (OCs) were first introduced, much misinformation abounds. Women need better information about how OCs work, how to

manage side effects, and what to do about missed pills, the report finds.

Taken correctly, OCs are one of the most effective family planning methods. Nonetheless, an estimated 10 percent of the 106 million women who start taking the pill each year become pregnant. If women used the pill perfectly, only one woman in 1,000 would become pregnant (0.1 percent). But typical first-year pregnancy rates are much higher and vary widely. In Bangladesh, the first-year pregnancy rate among OC users is 1.7 percent. In the United States, it is 6.9 percent and in Bolivia, 10.5 percent, according to the report in the latest issue of 'Population Reports, Helping Women Use the Pill,' published by the John Hopkins Population Information Programme.

Each year, an estimated 6.8 million women become pregnant after they stop taking the pill and fail to take up another method even though they want to avoid pregnancy, according to the Hopkins report. Many women stop taking the pill because of common side effects such as breakthrough bleeding and spotting, nausea and weight gain. In some countries—Bangladesh, Ecuador, Egypt and Tunisia, for example—surveys reveal that about half of women who stop taking pills do so because of side effects.

"Telling women about common side effects before they start OCs would prevent many problems," according to Vera Zidar, author of the report. "In addition, each user needs to know how to take the pill successfully. For example, many women don't know that starting a new pill pack late poses the greatest risk of pregnancy," adds Ms. Zidar.

Source: *Women's Feature Service*, August 2000