

Statement of Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, on World Health Day: Protecting midwives to keep women and babies safe amid the COVID-19 pandemic

On this World Health Day, we mark the first International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife. Midwives are central to everything we do at UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. Their life-saving skills go far beyond delivering babies; midwives educate, empower and enable women to lead healthy lives and to exercise their right to sexual and reproductive health.

Amid the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has already infected more than a million people worldwide, health professionals are unsung heroes working on the frontlines. Midwives risk their own lives to save those of pregnant women and newborns. They ensure safe and healthy pregnancies, taking every precaution to protect the women they serve.

Midwives play a critical role in responding to public health emergencies like COVID-19. They are essential to the strong, resilient health systems we need to survive the coronavirus. It is imperative not to jeopardize essential sexual and reproductive health services by diverting midwives to serve as emergency personnel.

Midwives who serve patients outside of hospitals are crucial to maintaining the safe distancing measures necessary to curb the spread of the disease. The more midwives who are ready to visit the homes of pregnant women in rural communities or who can offer phone-based antenatal and post-natal care, then the more people able to avoid transmitting or becoming infected by the coronavirus.

While the novel coronavirus sweeps the world, including many developing countries with fragile health systems, women continue to get pregnant and give birth. Midwives are essential to ensure safe pregnancies and births for everyone, everywhere. They also provide the information and contraceptive counselling that women and young people need, even in times of crisis.

As frontline health workers, midwives are particularly vulnerable to the virus. That means pregnant women and babies are at risk, too. We must take urgent action to protect midwives. This includes providing all midwives with the same personal protective equipment that other front-line health workers use to insulate themselves from contagion.

All over the world, midwives are stepping up to the COVID-19 challenge. With UNFPA support, midwives in hard-hit countries are working round the clock to provide care for women and babies. They say [they will never abandon their patients](#).

Together with the World Health Organization and other partners, UNFPA stands with the world's midwives, today and every day.

Life goes on despite the pandemic; pregnancy and childbirth are no exception. In this difficult time for all, and particularly for health care professionals, let's do everything in our power to protect midwives so they can continue to keep women and newborns safe.