

Maternal deaths in South Africa on the increase

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Maternal deaths increased significantly in South Africa between 2005 and 2007 when compared to the period 2002 to 2005. Not unexpectedly, HIV/ Aid accounts for almost half of all maternal deaths. This is according to a report, 'Saving Mothers 2005 – 2007', released via the Health Department this week.



Four out of ten maternal deaths are described as 'clearly avoidable within the health care system'. This conclusion is that the deaths could have been prevented had patients received sufficient care.

Most deaths occurred in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the province worst beset by HIV/AIDS. Over 350 deaths were reported in the province in 2006, an average of one a day. This is the highest recorded rate of any province in South Africa.

A third of the 2000 women dying in public health care had been tested for HIV/AIDS prior to or during admission and nearly 80 percent of those tested were HIV positive or had AIDS. According to the research, HIV/AIDS-related deaths are a cause of three times as many deaths as arise out of any other condition of complication during pregnancy.

In the report, 'maternal death' is defined as 'deaths of women while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes'.

Other significant causes of maternal deaths are hypertension, obstetric haemorrhage, pregnancy-related sepsis and existing maternal disease. In these cases health care professionals had failed to follow medical protocols in treating the condition or had failed to identify the condition at all.

On the up side is the finding that there has been a 14 percent decrease in the numbers of women dying from complications arising out of hypertension. Health workers are improving in managing this.

Recommended in the report are measures that improve the knowledge and skills of health care workers, better quality of reproductive health care, better management and greater community involvement.

Click here to access [the Health Department expanded executive summary of the report "saving mothers 2005-2007"](#)