

MATERNAL DEATH RATE DECLINING: REPORT

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has seen a decline from 130 per 1 lakh live births in 2014-2016 to 122 per 1 lakh live births in 2015-2017.

A decline of 8 points (6.2%) was observed during this period, according to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) 2015-2017 bulletin for MMR released on Thursday.

This is good news for India as nearly 2,000 maternal deaths have been averted per year, according to the bulletin. The figure has declined from 167 in 2011-2013 to 130 in 2014-2016 and to 122 in 2015-17, registering a 6.15 per cent reduction since the last survey figures of 2014-2016.

While Karnataka has shown the highest percentage decline in MMR, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have shown an increase by 15 points each in MMR.

To understand the maternal mortality situation in the country better and to map the changes, especially at the regional level, the government has categorised states into three groups: empowered action group (EAG), southern States and other states.

Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh/Uttarakhand and Assam fall under the EAG and Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in the southern States group. "Others" comprise the remaining States and Union Territories.

The decline has been most significant in EAG States from 188 to 175. The ratio has reduced considerably from 77 to 72 per 1,00,000 live births among southern states and in the other states from 93 to 90.

Independent MMR data of Jharkhand (76), Chhattisgarh (141) and Uttarakhand (89) has been released for the first time in the SRS 2015-2017 bulletin.

While Rajasthan's MMR has shown the highest decrease by 13 points, followed by Odisha (12 points) and Karnataka (11 points), the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab have not shown any change in the ratio. Retaining its first position, Kerala has reduced its MMR from 46 in 2014-2016 to 42 in 2015-2017. Likewise, Maharashtra retained its second position with 55 (down from 61) and Tamil Nadu its third position with 63 (down from 66).

Union Joint Commissioner (Maternal Health) Dinesh Baswal told *The Hindu* that the decline is important for India as 11 States have achieved the National Health Policy target of MMR 100 per lakh live births well ahead of 2020. "This has been possible in view of the gains made in institutional deliveries and focused approach towards aspirational districts and inter-sectoral action to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable mothers," he said.

Focus on quality and coverage of health services through public health initiatives under the National Health Mission such as LaQshya, Poshan Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, Janani Suraksha Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana have contributed to this decline, he said.

"India is now committed to ensuring that not a single mother or newborn dies due to a

preventable cause and move towards zero preventable maternal and newborn deaths through the recently launched Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan Initiative (SUMAN),” he added.

The WHO last year lauded India’s progress in reducing the MMR saying the progress puts the country on track towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of an MMR below 70 by 2030.

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