

HEALTH BRIEFS

What is menopause?

Menopause is that time in a woman's life when her periods start becoming irregular and eventually stop. This is because the ovaries have stopped producing a hormone called oestrogen.

This means she will no longer be able to have children. This process can take place over a period of 15 years or more, usually between the ages of 40 and 55.

Every female child is born with oestrogen in her body. A woman's hormone levels increase until she is between her late 20's and her mid-30's. Then her oestrogen levels begin to slow down. When a woman is near 50, her oestrogen may reach a level which is too low to maintain her regular menstrual cycle. This is menopause.

What are our reproductive rights?

Reproductive rights mean the right to:

- Full information about sexuality, health and reproduction, the advantages and disadvantages of medicine, contraceptives and medical treatment.
- Reproductive health services that meet

women's needs and are available for all women.

- Safe and effective contraception.
- Safe and legal abortion.
- Safe women-controlled pregnancy and childbirth.
- Prevention of and safe effective treatment for the causes of infertility.

The spread of abortion

Around 50 million abortions take place every year in the world. It is said that one out of every four pregnancies ends in abortion. More than half of all abortions take place in developing countries and nearly half of all abortions take

place outside the health care system.

Between 36 and 53 million abortions were performed worldwide in 1987. Of those, 10 to 22 million were illegal. It is clear that abortion is a common experience among women.

AIDS is growing fastest among young women

Among sexually active people, those being infected with the AIDS virus at the fastest rate are women in their teens and early twenties.

According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme, women between the ages of 15 and 25 make up about 70% of the 3000 women a day who become infected with the AIDS virus and 500 women a day who die of AIDS.

In many societies, the youngest women are exposed to rape, incest and adultery. Access to health care is poor and many sexually transmitted diseases go untreated.

The report said: "The silence surrounding the infection of young women must be broken. Girls and young women must be able to speak out, to stop feeling silenced and powerless to change what happens to them. Others, too, must speak out..."

