



WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist Implementation Guide

*Improving the quality of facility-based delivery
for mothers and newborns*



World Health
Organization


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CONTENTS

Introduction to the Implementation Guide	6
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Background & Overview of the WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist	8
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Checklist development	8
Evidence from testing	8
Overview of the WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist	10
Tips on using the Checklist	11

The WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist	14
-----------------------------------	----

Implementing the WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist	20
--	----

Engage	21
Launch	24
Support	25

Annexes	30
---------	----

Safe Birth Supplies	30
Guide to holding a launch event	32
WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist pause point illustrations	34
Principles of effective coaching	36
Observation tool	39
Coaching tool	43

Glossary	46
----------	----

Description of Checklist Items	46
--------------------------------	----

References	60
------------	----

Acknowledgements	61
------------------	----

INTRODUCTION




In 2013, 289 000 women died during and following pregnancy and childbirth, and 2.8 million newborns died within 28 days of birth. The majority of these deaths occurred in low-resource settings and most could have been prevented.¹

Childbirth is a complex process, and it is essential to remember to provide everything that is needed to ensure both the mother and newborn child receive the safest care possible. Checklists are useful tools to organize such complex, and important processes – they have long been used to prompt users to remember essential tasks to deliver better and safer care in a variety of settings.^{1,2}

The WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist was designed as a tool to improve the quality of care provided to women giving birth. The Checklist is an organized list of evidence-based essential birth practices, which targets the major causes of maternal deaths, intrapartum-related stillbirths and neonatal deaths that occur in health-care facilities around the world. Each Checklist item is a critical action that, if missed, can lead to severe harm for the mother, the newborn, or both.

Experience with other patient safety tools, including the WHO Surgical Safety Checklist, highlights that simply offering a checklist to a health-care worker or demanding that a facility or system use a patient safety tool does not result in widespread, consistent use of the checklist or tool. Nor do such strategies lead to improved care for patients.² As a result, this guide has been developed to help birth attendants and health-care leaders successfully use the WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist. We have drawn on lessons learned by a wide range of health-care professionals who have tested, used, and championed the Checklist across the world.

Development, use and implementation of the Checklist are described in this guide. It covers how to introduce and ensure continuous use of the Checklist by engaging relevant stakeholders, how to launch the Checklist formally, and how to provide support through coaching and data-sharing. The annexes provide a more detailed description of the Checklist items, as well as useful resources to complement the implementation approach described.



THIS IMPLEMENTATION
GUIDE AND THE WHO SAFE
CHILDBIRTH CHECKLIST
ARE ALSO AVAILABLE
ONLINE AT:
[www.who.int/patientsafety/
implementation/checklists/
childbirth/](http://www.who.int/patientsafety/implementation/checklists/childbirth/)

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW



Childbirth is a complex process with many necessary, sometimes difficult, sometimes complicated steps that ensure both the mother and her newborn child receive the safest care possible. Most people find it difficult to simply remember all of the relevant information; actually performing all the steps correctly and in the correct order is even more challenging. But in settings from restaurants to construction sites, from airplanes to hospitals, professionals are successfully using checklists to organize and order large amounts of complex information, to remind themselves to perform crucial duties, and to ultimately do their jobs more effectively, efficiently and safely.³

Checklist development

With this evidence in mind, the World Health Organization — with input from nurses, midwives, obstetricians, paediatricians, general practitioners, patient safety experts and patients from around the world — developed the WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist (the Checklist) to help health-care workers provide high quality care during births in health facilities, from the moment the mother arrives to the moment the mother and her newborn leave the facility.^{3,4}

The Checklist is a list of evidence-based practices, organized into four different pause points. Based on WHO guidelines, the items on the Checklist help prevent the major worldwide causes of maternal deaths, intrapartum-related stillbirths and neonatal deaths (including haemorrhage, infection, obstructed labour and hypertensive disorders and complications of prematurity). Each task on the Checklist is a crucial action that, if missed, can result in severe harm for the mother, the newborn, or both.

THE IMPORTANCE
OF THE CHECKLIST:
These safe childbirth
practices have been
proven to reduce
maternal and
newborn harm.

Evidence from testing

The World Health Organization has tested the Checklist extensively. The pilot edition of the WHO Safe Childbirth Checklist underwent field evaluation in nine countries, providing thorough feedback. WHO used that feedback to revise the Checklist, and it was then field-tested in Karnataka State, India. It was found that the delivery of evidence-based essential birth practices at each birth event increased from an average of 10 out of 29 practices prior to introduction of the Checklist to an average of 25 out of 29 practices after the Checklist had been introduced.²

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