A meeting on preconception care in the Eastern Mediterranean Region was held in Muscat, Oman, from 25 to 27 March 2015. The meeting was organized by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, and attended by 47 participants from 13 countries, along with experts from the Region and globally, as well as staff from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- review preconception health needs and national capacity in the participating countries for the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of preconception care interventions;

- update the participants on evidence-based effective preconception care interventions; and

- identify necessary country actions to strengthen preconception care in line with the related WHO guidelines, taking into consideration cultural sensitivities.

## Improving health outcomes

Preconception care could reduce early and unplanned pregnancies and improve birth spacing. It could also contribute to reducing the risk of genetic disorders and environmental exposure, and to reducing maternal and childhood mortality, and improving maternal and child health outcomes. It could also contribute to improving the health and well-being of women in other areas of public health such as nutrition, infertility/subfertility, mental health,intimate partner and sexual violence, substance use. In this way, preconception care could make useful contributions to Millennium Development Goals 1, 3, 4 and 5. In the long term, preconception care could contribute to improving the health of babies and children as they grow into adolescence and adulthood.

By supporting women to make well-informed and well-considered decisions about their fertility and their health, preconception care could contribute to the social and economic development of families and communities. By creating awareness of the importance of men's health and men's behaviours on maternal and child health outcomes, and by promoting male involvement, it could resultin additional benefits that this engenders.

## Congenital disorders

In the Region, hereditary diseases and congenital malformations have been reported to affect between 2% and 5% of all live births, to account for up to 30% of paediatric hospital admissions, and in some countries to cause about half of children's deaths. The magnitude of the problem of such disorders in the Region can be attributed to a number of factors. These are mainly: high rates of consanguineous marriage, young and advanced maternal age at childbearing, ill-health of mothers before pregnancy, and lack of public health measures to address these factors.

**Related report**

Summary report on the Meeting on promoting preconception care in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Muscat, Oman, 25–27 March 2015

**Related link**

Preconception care to reduce maternal and childhood mortality and morbidity

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