

# Birth spacing

## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE



# Birth spacing<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this session is to enable trainees to:

- understand and discuss the importance and benefits of birth spacing and the use of family planning methods;
- understand and discuss the importance of family planning during the postpartum period;
- improve awareness of available family planning methods and of where to seek them.

## **Expected outcomes**

After completion of this session trainees will be able to:

- advocate for birth spacing and for the use of family planning methods to improve the health of women and newborn babies;
- identify which family planning methods are available in their area and provide basic information to women and families on the importance of birth spacing, available contraceptive methods and where to seek advice and services;
- advise women and encourage them to talk to their health worker about which method of family planning is the most suitable for them.

## **Training methodology**

Plenary and group discussions and demonstrations will be used to train cluster representatives and health volunteers.

The materials needed to conduct the training sessions include:

- the CBI manual for cluster representatives and health volunteers;
- flip charts;
- information on birth spacing methods available in the area;
- overhead projector/multimedia projector, if available.

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<sup>1</sup> This session has been adapted from session 12 'Family planning counselling' of *A handbook for building skills: counselling for maternal and newborn health*. Geneva, WHO (unpublished data).

**Table 1. Training session lesson plan**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Materials required</b>
Introduction		30 minutes	Flip chart with objectives
Presentation of participants			
Presentation of the objectives			
Benefits of birth spacing and postpartum family planning	Discussions in plenary	20 minutes	Flip chart, markers
Barriers to birth spacing and use of family planning methods	Group discussions	50 minutes	Flip chart, markers
Break			
Methods of birth spacing	Group discussions Demonstration	60 minutes	Flip chart, markers One sample of each method of birth spacing to display Posters on family planning methods, if available
Role of cluster representatives and health volunteers	Group discussions	30 minutes	Flip chart, markers
Next steps		10 minutes	

### **The benefits of birth spacing and postpartum family planning (20 minutes)**

Tell participants that it is important during pregnancy for a woman and her husband to begin to think about birth spacing and what family planning method they wish to use. Family planning is about deciding how many children you want to have and when you want to have them. After birth, the recommended interval before attempting the next pregnancy is at least two years. This will reduce risks for the mother and baby. A woman who is not fully or nearly exclusively breastfeeding can become pregnant as soon as four to six weeks after childbirth. (5 minutes).

Ask the participants in plenary to discuss what the health benefits of birth spacing and family planning are. The training facilitator should elicit the following (15 minutes):

- It saves lives.
- It reduces abortions or unwanted pregnancies.
- It is good for the mother's and the baby's health.
- It improves children's health, nutrition and development.
- It allows the mother to recover physically and emotionally before she becomes pregnant again and faces the demands of another pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and child care.
- The correct and consistent use of condoms as a family planning method can also prevent sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.
- It increases equity among community members.
- It helps preserve the environment.
- It enables proper planning of family resources for each child.
- It enables more time for the parents to dedicate to each child.

- Avoiding too early pregnancy after marriage can give young women the opportunity to complete their school education and high school or university studies.

Write down all the comments on a flip chart.

### **Barriers to birth spacing and use of family planning methods (50 minutes)**

In plenary, present data available on birth spacing in the area or at national level if local data are not available. Ask participants if the data are in line with the recommended intervals. Also ask if there are only national data, what do they think is the average space between births in their areas. (10 minutes)

Divide the participants into two groups. (20 minutes)

#### *Group 1*

Ask participants to discuss what the barriers in their area are to achieving birth spacing or to discuss the reasons for not spacing births. Write down the barriers they identify on a flip chart.

#### *Group 2*

Ask participants to discuss what type of families follow the recommended space between births in their area and what are the factors that contribute to appropriate spacing? Write down the contributing factors on a flip chart.

Two groups present their findings. Ask the other group whether they have questions, points they want to raise or comments they wish to add. (10 minutes)

Conclude the session by explaining that cluster representatives and health volunteers can advise women and their family about birth spacing, its advantages and can help them to overcome barriers to achieving birth spacing. They can advocate the benefits of birth spacing and family planning among influential persons in the community (e.g. traditional, religious and political leaders) so that they understand how it will help to improve the health and well-being of individuals and the community as a whole, encourage its practice and help overcome barriers. (10 minutes)

### **Method of birth spacing (60 minutes)**

Ask participants to cite which birth spacing methods they are aware of. Write the names on a flip chart. (25 minutes)

The facilitator tells the participants that there are different types of birth spacing methods, i.e. temporary birth spacing methods, permanent birth spacing methods and traditional methods. Ask participants to group the birth spacing methods they listed according to the different categories.

The facilitator completes the list of birth spacing methods available in the health centre as follows.

### *Temporary birth spacing methods*

- the lactation amenorrhoea method (LAM);
- condoms;
- combined pill;
- mini pill;
- injectables;
- subdermal implants;
- intrauterine devices (IUD);
- diaphragms and cervical caps;
- spermicidals.

### *Permanent birth spacing methods*

- surgery for men (vasectomy);
- surgery for women (female sterilization).

### *Traditional methods*

- fertility awareness-based methods, including rhythm
- withdrawal.

The facilitator explains that lactation amenorrhoea method (LAM) is a way to prevent pregnancy when the following three requirements are met: the mother is exclusively breastfeeding her baby immediately after childbirth, i.e. giving baby breast milk only (with no other food or drink); the baby is less than 6 months of age; and the mother has not started menstruating. If any of these requirements are not met, the mother will not be protected. Once the baby reaches 6 months of age or receives complementary foods or the mother's periods have returned the mother should use another method. The mother needs to start thinking beforehand about what method she will use.

Then the facilitator presents the available birth spacing methods to the participants: condoms, combined pills, mini pill, injectables, subdermal implants, intrauterine devices (IUD), diaphragms and cervical caps and spermicidals. The facilitator explains that several methods of family planning can be started immediately after birth, but others may need to be delayed if the mother is breastfeeding. The group should together review Annex 1 of the Birth spacing unit of the manual and review briefly with the group when to use the various birth spacing methods. (30 minutes)

The facilitator explains that there is no single method of family planning which should be recommended for everyone. At the health centre, family planning counselling can help a woman and/or her husband choose which method best suits him or her. If a woman, preferably with her husband, is able to make an informed choice, she is more likely to be satisfied with the method chosen and to continue its use. The health worker will discuss with the woman and her husband their specific needs, inform them about the different family planning methods that are available, and will counsel them so that they can choose the family planning method that best suits their situation. The health worker will check whether the woman is eligible to use the chosen method and will provide useful information about that method. (5 minutes)

### **Role of cluster representatives and health volunteers (30 minutes)**

Ask participants what they think they can do as cluster representatives and health volunteers to support pregnant women and their families to space the births. Write the possible answers on a flip chart. (20 minutes)

The facilitator concludes by reinforcing the role of cluster representatives and health volunteers is to:

- visit all pregnant women during their pregnancy and after birth during the postpartum period.
- advocate and explain the health benefits of birth spacing to pregnant women and their families and to community leaders and other influential people in the community and help them to overcome barriers to birth spacing.
- advise mothers, their husbands and their families to discuss birth spacing with the health worker and to discuss the type of family planning methods available that can be used after birth. Tell women and their families that the health workers should discuss birth spacing during the third trimester of pregnancy and in the immediate postpartum period with all pregnant women, mothers who have recently given birth, their husbands and families. (10 minutes)

### **Next steps (10 minutes)**

Tell participants that during two months they will put into practice what they have been learning during this training session and they will review the implementation and possible challenges. Follow-up and support will be provided during the following two months.

**Pre/post-test questionnaire**

**A. What are the benefits of birth spacing? Mark all the possible responses.**

- 1. It reduces abortions and unwanted pregnancies
- 2. It is good for the mother's and the baby's health
- 3. It allows women to continue going to school
- 4. It enables proper planning of family resources for each child
- 5. It allows the mother to recover physically and emotionally before she becomes pregnant again
- 6. It improves children's health, nutrition and development
- 7. It allows the mother to do more work at home
- 8. It enables more time for the parents to dedicate to each child.

**B. Please cite four temporary birth spacing methods?**

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....
- 4. ....

**C. What is the role of cluster representatives and health volunteers? Indicate all possible responses.**

- 1. To distribute birth spacing methods
- 2. To advise women and their husbands to talk to the health worker about birth spacing
- 3. To advocate birth spacing among community leaders and influential people
- 4. To inform women and their husbands about where birth spacing methods are available
- 5. To give information on how each birth spacing method work