The latest inter-agency estimates suggest that 536,000 women died in 2005 from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

risks for mothers are particularly elevated within the first two days after birth. Most maternal deaths are related to obstetric complications – including post-partum haemorrhage, infections, eclampsia and prolonged or obstructed labour – and complications of abortion. Most of these direct causes of maternal mortality can be readily addressed if skilled health personnel are on hand and key drugs, equipment and referral facilities are available.\textsuperscript{12} (For further details on birth complications and emergency obstetric care, see Chapter 3.)

**Indirect causes**

Many factors contributing to a mother’s risk of dying are not unique to pregnancy but may be exacerbated by pregnancy and childbirth. Attributing these causes to pregnancy is difficult owing to the poor diagnostic capacity of many countries’ health information systems. Nonetheless, assessing the indirect causes of maternal deaths helps determine the most appropriate intervention strategies for maternal and child health. Collaboration between condition-specific programmes – such as those to address malaria or AIDS – and maternal health initiatives may often be the most effective way to address some of these indirect causes, including those that are highly preventable or treatable, such as anaemia.\textsuperscript{13}

Maternal anaemia affects about half of all pregnant women. Pregnant adolescents are more prone to anaemia than older women, and they often receive less care. Infectious diseases such as malaria, which affects around 50 million pregnant women living in malaria-endemic countries every year, and intestinal parasites can exacerbate anaemia, as can poor-quality diets – all of which heighten vulnerability to maternal death. Severe anaemia contributes to the risk of death in cases of haemorrhage.\textsuperscript{14}

Anaemia is highly treatable with iron supplements offered through maternal health programmes. This intervention, however, remains limit-