



28 October 2014 – The Ebola crisis has left health systems reeling, increasing threats to pregnant women. Many women refuse to seek care from health centres, and some overwhelmed, undersupplied health facilities are turning away those who arrive.

Throughout the three most-affected countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – health facilities are gravely understaffed, and in many, health workers lack the personal protection equipment required to keep them safe from exposure.

Sierra Leone has one of the world's [highest infant mortality rates](#), and the Ebola crisis is likely to push it even higher. According to health officials, almost all pregnant women infected with Ebola die from the disease, along with their unborn babies.

Additionally, the crisis has left pregnant women vulnerable to exploitation: many have reported [being refused care](#)

or facing exorbitant fees.

Turned away by hospital staff

Mr. and Ms. Fayiah were one of them. Nurses told Ms. Fayiah she would require a surgical delivery, but only after a \$450 fee was paid.

'The hospital administration requested a cash down payment of \$450 before my wife would be touched,' Mr. Fayiah stated in an interview with UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund.

'Upon realizing that we didn't have the money, and for fear that my wife could pass away in their premises, a man acting on the order of the hospital physically pushed my wife out. He said, Get outside! Do you think this is a free hospital?'

They walked barely ten metres before Ms. Fayiah collapsed and began to deliver twin girls. Instead of receiving care from hospital staff, she was assisted by people on the street. 'Onlookers came, including women who formed a human chain barrier using their clothes, and a nurse assistant who was passing on a motorbike assisted my wife to deliver.'

800,000 women

[UNFPA](#) estimates that in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone more than 800,000 women will give birth in the next 12 months. Of these, more than 120,000 could die of complications in pregnancy and childbirth if life-saving emergency obstetric care is not provided.

Since start of the outbreak, the UN and UNFPA has worked closely with governments and partners to provide personal protection equipment, disinfectant materials, and reproductive health supplies and equipment, helping health workers provide safe, compassionate care for

women. Mobile clinics and tent-based outreach to pregnant women has been provided, and hundreds of midwives recruited to provide maternal health and family planning services.

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