

## Obstetric Fistula In Brief

Obstetric fistula is a hole in the birth canal caused by prolonged labor without prompt medical intervention, usually a Caesarean section. The woman is left with chronic incontinence and, in most cases, a stillborn baby.

The smell of leaking urine or feces, or both, is constant and humiliating, often driving loved ones away. Left untreated, fistula can lead to chronic medical problems, including ulcerations, kidney disease, and nerve damage in the legs.

A simple surgery can normally repair the injury, with success rates as high as 90 per cent for experienced surgeons. The average cost of fistula treatment and post-operative care is just US \$300. Sadly, most women with the condition do not know that treatment is available, or they cannot afford it.

Like maternal mortality, fistula is almost entirely preventable. But at least 2 million

women in Africa, Asia and the Arab region are living with the condition, and some 50,000 to 100,000 new cases develop each year. The persistence of fistula is a signal that health systems are failing to meet the needs of women.

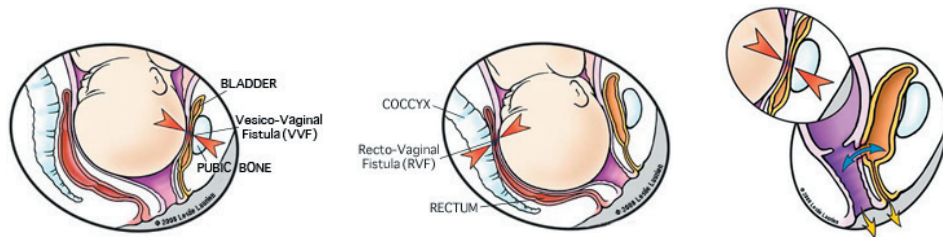
Obstetric fistula occurs disproportionately among impoverished girls and women, especially those living far from medical services. Affecting the most powerless members of society, it touches on nearly every aspect of UNFPA's mandate, including reproductive health and rights, gender equality, poverty and adolescent reproductive health.

In 2003, UNFPA spearheaded the global Campaign to End Fistula, a collaborative initiative to prevent fistula and restore the health and dignity of those living with its consequences.

[http://www.endfistula.org/fistula\\_brief.htm](http://www.endfistula.org/fistula_brief.htm)

### how does fistula occur?

Unattended obstructed labor can last for up to six or seven days, although the fetus usually dies after two or three days. During the prolonged labor, the soft tissues of the pelvis are compressed between the descending baby's head and the mother's pelvic bone. The lack of blood flow causes tissue to die, creating a hole between the mother's vagina and bladder (known as a vesicovaginal fistula), or between the vagina and rectum (causing a rectovaginal fistula) or both. The result is a leaking of urine or feces or both.



[http://www.endfistula.org/q\\_a.htm](http://www.endfistula.org/q_a.htm)

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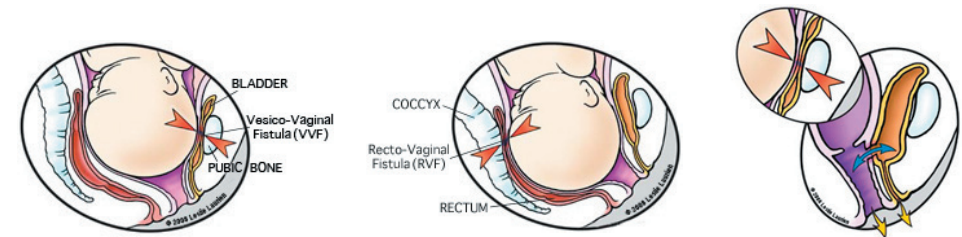
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