

## Top health authority urges stronger maternal safety measures



Ma Xiaowei, deputy head of the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) [File photo/Baidu]

The state health authority Thursday urged the strengthening of maternal safety to reduce maternal and infant mortality.

At present, and for the foreseeable future, the number of older women becoming pregnant and higher risk pregnancies will continue to increase, according the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC).

According to the commission, 18.46 million babies were born in China last year, an increase of 11.5 percent from 2015. More than 7.4 million babies were born from January to May, up 7.8 percent year on year.

In response to China's rapidly aging population, the country allowed married couples to have two children from 2016, ending the one-child policy implemented decades ago to rein in a surging population.

The commission said 60 percent of women eligible to have a second child are 35 years old or above. The number of older women becoming pregnant will exceed three million each year from 2017 to 2020.

This will result in an increased risk of complications in pregnancy and pose more challenges to obstetric and paediatric services.

"It is an arduous task to guarantee maternal and infant safety," said Ma

Xiaowei, deputy head of the NHFPC.

The commission called for stronger measures to guarantee maternal and infant safety, urged comprehensive screening and assessment of gestation period risks, and enhanced management and treatment of higher risk pregnancies.

The next step for the commission is to release a notice to improve maternal safety and launch an action plan.

"We will do whatever we can to guarantee the birth of healthy babies," said Ma.