



## Health Equity

# Working Together to Reduce Black Maternal Mortality

April 3, 2023

Black Maternal Health Week is recognized each year from April 11-17 to bring attention and action in improving Black maternal health. Everyone can play a role in working to prevent pregnancy-related deaths and improving maternal health outcomes.

### Most Pregnancy-Related Deaths are Preventable



Black Maternal Health Week is recognized each year from April 11-17 to bring awareness to Black maternal health.

Each year in the United States, hundreds of people die during pregnancy or in the year after. Thousands more have unexpected outcomes of labor and delivery with serious short- or long-term health consequences. Every pregnancy-related death is tragic, especially because more than 80% of pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. are [preventable](#). Recognizing urgent maternal warning signs, providing timely treatment, and delivering respectful, quality care can prevent many pregnancy-related deaths.

## Racial Disparities Exist

Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than White women. Multiple factors contribute to these disparities, such as variation in quality healthcare, underlying chronic conditions, structural racism, and implicit bias. Social determinants of health prevent many people from racial and ethnic minority groups from having fair opportunities for economic, physical, and emotional health.

## Working Together to Reduce Black Maternal Mortality

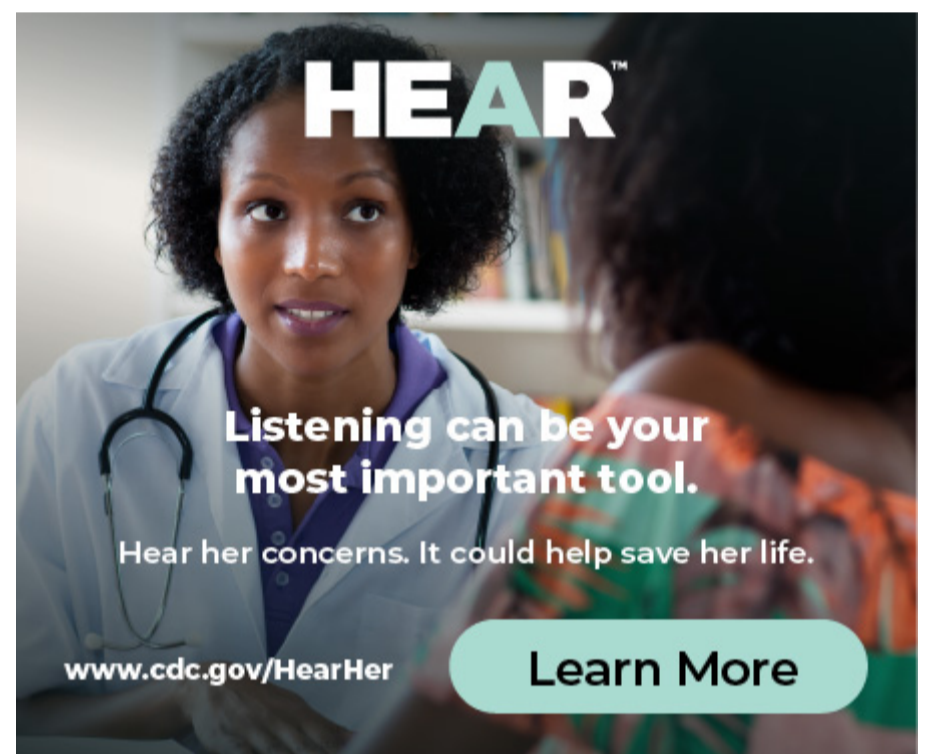
During Black Maternal Health Week, learn how you can support pregnant people in your life to reduce factors that contribute to pregnancy-related complications and death.

### Pregnant people and their families can:

- Talk to a healthcare provider if anything doesn't feel right or is concerning.
- Know and seek immediate care if experiencing any of the [urgent maternal warning signs](#), including severe headache, extreme swelling of hands or face, trouble breathing, heavy vaginal bleeding or discharge, overwhelming tiredness, and more. These symptoms could indicate a potentially life-threatening complication.
- Share recent pregnancy history during each medical care visit for up to one year after delivery.
- Connect with healthcare and social support systems before, during, and after pregnancy.

### Healthcare providers can:

- Ask questions to better understand their patient and things that may be affecting their lives.
- Help patients, and those accompanying them, understand the [urgent maternal warning signs](#) and when to seek medical attention right away.
- Help patients manage chronic conditions or conditions that may arise during pregnancy like [hypertension](#), [diabetes](#), or [depression](#).
- Recognize and work to eliminate [unconscious bias](#) [↗](#) in themselves and in their office on an ongoing basis.
- Respond to any concerns patients may have.
- Provide all patients with respectful quality care.



### Hospitals and healthcare systems can:

- Identify and address [unconscious bias in healthcare](#). [↗](#)
- Standardize coordination of care and response to emergencies.
- Improve delivery of [quality prenatal and postpartum care](#).
- Train non-obstetric care providers to ask about pregnancy history in the preceding year.

### States and communities can:

- Assess and coordinate delivery hospitals for [risk-appropriate care](#).
- Support [review of the causes and opportunities for prevention behind every pregnancy-related death](#).
- Identify and address [social factors](#) influencing maternal health such as unstable housing, transportation access, food insecurity, substance use, violence, and racial and economic inequality.



Everyone has a role to play in promoting maternal health.

## CDC Activities to Prevent Maternal Mortality

To prevent pregnancy-related deaths, CDC:

- Supports states through the [Enhancing Reviews and Surveillance to Eliminate Maternal Mortality \(ERASE MM\) Program](#). This work facilitates an understanding of the drivers of maternal mortality and complications of pregnancy to better prevent maternal deaths and reduce racial disparities.
- Supports state [perinatal quality collaboratives \(PQCs\)](#) to improve the quality of care for mothers and their babies. This work supports the capabilities of PQCs to improve the quality of perinatal care in their states, including efforts to improve equity in care and outcomes.
- Helps states standardize their assessments of levels of maternal and newborn care for their delivery hospitals by offering the [CDC Levels of Care Assessment Tool](#) and providing technical assistance to those who want to use it.
- Promotes the [Hear Her](#) campaign to raise awareness of potentially life-threatening warning signs during and after pregnancy and improve communication between patients and their healthcare providers.

## COVID-19 and Pregnancy

People who are pregnant or were recently pregnant are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19 compared to people who are not pregnant. [Getting a COVID-19 vaccine](#) can help protect pregnant people from getting very sick from COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, trying to get pregnant now, or might become pregnant in the future. Non-Hispanic Black women have lower COVID-19 vaccination coverage during pregnancy compared to pregnant women from other racial and ethnic groups. This inequity is related to past and other existing inequities in health and its social determinants.

Learn more about [COVID-19 and pregnant people](#) and how to reduce risks and stay healthy.

## More Information

- [CDC Hear Her Campaign](#)
- [CDC Maternal and Infant Health](#)
- [Maternal Mortality](#)
- [CDC Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2020](#)
- [CDC Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System](#)
- [CDC Pregnancy-Related Deaths: Data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees in 36 US States, 2017–2019](#)
- [CDC Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths - United States, 2007-2016](#)
- [CDC Vital Signs: Pregnancy-Related Deaths, United States, 2011-2015 and Strategies for Prevention, 13 States, 2013-2017](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 and Pregnant People](#)
- [HHS Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Maternal Health Care](#) 

Last Reviewed: April 3, 2023