

Older mothers have higher rates of severe complications in childbirth

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The risk of potentially life-threatening morbidity around childbirth, such as renal failure, obstetric shock, and amniotic fluid embolism, increases in older mothers, according to a study published by Sarka Lisonkova

from the University of British Columbia, Canada and colleagues in *PLOS Medicine*.

The researchers examined data on all singleton births to women residing in Washington State, US, 2003 to 2013 (n = 828,269) and compared age-specific rates of maternal mortality and severe morbidity (e.g., obstetric shock, amniotic fluid embolism). After adjusting for potential confounding factors, such as parity, [body mass index](#), and assisted conception, and compared with [mothers](#) 25-29 years, they observed increased rates of obstetric shock among mothers >35 years (adjusted odds ratios [AOR] =2.6, 95% CI 1.5-4.5), amniotic fluid embolism among mothers ≥40 years (AOR = 8.0, 95% CI 2.7-23.7), and [renal failure](#) (AOR = 15.9, 95% CI 4.8-52.0), complications of obstetric interventions (AOR = 4.7, 95% CI 2.3-9.5), and intensive care unit (ICU) admission (AOR = 4.8, 95% CI 2.0-11.9) among those 45-49 years. Furthermore, they observed that maternal sepsis was significantly higher among teenage mothers than among those 25-29 years (AOR = 1.2, 95% CI 1.1-1.4). The adjusted risk difference in overall severe maternal morbidity compared to mothers 25-29 years was 0.9% (95% CI 0.7%-1.2%) for mothers 40-44 years, 1.6% (95% CI 0.7%-2.8%) for mothers 45-49 years, and 6.4% for mothers ≥50 years (95% CI 1.7%-18.2%).

Despite the large sample size, statistical power was insufficient to examine the association between maternal age and maternal death or very rare severe morbidities.

The authors say: "These results should improve counselling to women who contemplate delaying childbirth until their forties and provide useful information to their health care providers. As [maternal age](#) continues to increase, the rate of severe maternal morbidity is likely to increase in the future."

More information: Lisonkova S, Potts J, Muraca GM, Razaz N, Sabr Y, Chan W-S, et al. (2017) Maternal age and severe maternal morbidity: A population-based retrospective cohort study. *PLoS Med* 14(5): e1002307. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002307

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