

More women opting to give birth outside of a hospital, research finds

December 13 2018, by Sara Gavin



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An increasing number of women in the United States are choosing to give birth outside of hospitals and the demand for nontraditional delivery options is likely higher than current data shows, according to new research from the Maryland Population Research Center (MPRC). Published in the December 11 edition of *Birth*, the research finds that

one out of every 62 births (1.61 percent) in the United States in 2017 took place at a home or in a birth center—the most ever recorded in the 30 years of national birth certificate data available.

After a gradual decline between 1990 and 2004, out-of-hospital births increased by 85 percent from 2004 to 2017, researchers discovered. They also found that non-Hispanic white [women](#) were more likely than any other group to have an out-of-[hospital birth](#). For these women, one out of every 41 births (2.43 percent) was an out-of-hospital birth.

MPRC researchers say these figures underestimate the true number of women who choose out-of-hospital births, because those who give birth outside of the hospital but then are transferred to a hospital during labor or delivery are reported on birth certificates as hospital births. Meanwhile, newly available data on payment methods showed more than two-thirds of planned home births were self-paid by the mother (i.e. not covered by either [private health insurance](#) or Medicaid), compared to one-third of birth center births and just 3 percent of hospital births.

"The lack of access to payment options for out-of-hospital births may prevent many women from making these choices, suggesting demand for out-of-hospital birth is considerably higher than what the data tells us," said research professor Marian MacDorman, the lead author on the study. "The question that arises from our findings is, what is happening during hospital births that is leading women to seek other options, even when that means bucking convention and paying more to deliver at home or in a birth center?"

A recent national survey of post-partum mothers showed that 64 percent would consider a birth [center](#) birth and 29 percent would consider a home birth for future pregnancies. Researchers say women who choose out-of-hospital birth do so because they feel it is safer, with lower rates of cesarean and other interventions, and because they feel more in

control of their experience.

"These findings raise [questions](#) about the nature of care in the dominant model of maternity care in the U.S.," MacDorman said. "Many mothers are turning away from hospitals because they're seeking a place to give [birth](#) where they feel empowered, engaged and safe."

More information: Marian F. MacDorman et al. Trends and state variations in out-of-hospital births in the United States, 2004-2017, *Birth* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/birt.12411](https://doi.org/10.1111/birt.12411)

Provided by University of Maryland

Citation: More women opting to give birth outside of a hospital, research finds (2018, December 13) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-12-women-opting-birth-hospital.html>

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