

Black newborns three times more likely to die when cared for by white doctor: study

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A team of researchers from several institutions in the U.S. has found that newborn Black babies are three times more likely to die just after birth when they are cared for by a white doctor, compared to the national

average. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their study of Florida medical records and the race of doctors caring for newborns, and what they found.

Multiple recent studies have shown that Black people in the U.S. do not receive the same level of medical care as [white people](#). Prior research has also shown that Black [babies](#) are more than twice as likely to die during their first year of life than are white babies. In this new effort, the researchers have now found that Black newborn babies are less likely to survive if they have white doctors.

The work involved obtaining [birth records](#) for approximately 2 million babies born in Florida over the years 1992 to 2015. For each of the births, photographs of the doctor who delivered them were also obtained to ascertain their race. The team then analyzed the data, looking for discrepancies. They found that Black babies died at a higher rate when cared for by a white doctor as compared to the national average for all [newborn deaths](#)—at a rate of 430 per 100,000. This was not the case, however, when Black babies were born under the care of Black doctors. That rate was 173 per 100,000 deaths—58 percent better, but still higher than the national average.

The researchers noted that the differences in death rates appeared to correlate more strongly in complicated deliveries, which was expected. Unfortunately, there were similar correlations in hospitals that delivered high numbers of Black babies.

The work by the team did not reveal the reason behind the discrepancies they found, though they suggest that racism likely plays a key role. It was also not clear whether the higher death rates were due to less diligence by white doctors or because less skilled white doctors were more likely to practice in hospital settings where more Black babies were being born.

More information: Brad N. Greenwood et al. Physician–patient racial concordance and disparities in birthing mortality for newborns, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2020). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1913405117](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1913405117)

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