

COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased maternal mortality in Mexico

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Being pregnant in Mexico during the pandemic had deadly consequences for many, with a new study from Texas A&M University Health Science Center (Texas A&M Health) showing an increase of 60 percent maternal

mortality between Feb. 2020 and Feb. 2021.

Published in the journal *BMC Public Health*, the research study used [public health data](#) from Mexico's General Office of Health Information to estimate changes in the [maternal mortality](#) ratio due to COVID-19 infections and changes in care resulting from efforts to [control the pandemic](#).

Maternal [mortality](#) is considered a key indicator of [health](#) care system access and availability. Access to quality prenatal and postpartum care can prevent [maternal deaths](#) in many cases. However, pandemic control efforts and shifting of health care resources led to reductions in prenatal care visits and the amount of care women received after giving birth. Additionally, pregnancy can cause changes in respiratory and immune function. This could affect the severity of COVID-19 infections and lead to poorer outcomes.

Genny Carrillo, MD, ScD, associate professor at the Texas A&M School of Public Health, and researchers from hospitals and public health agencies in Mexico analyzed data including official [death](#) certificates, a national epidemiological surveillance database, and a weekly report of women with diagnosed or suspected COVID-19 who were pregnant or had recently given birth. These data included information on age, ethnicity, diagnosis codes, insurance status and other factors. The researchers analyzed the data to calculate the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 births and compared that ratio to previous years. Additionally, they focused on maternal deaths directly linked to COVID-19.

The analysis found more than 1,000 maternal deaths in Mexico during the study period, which amounted to an increase in maternal mortality of nearly 60 percent. This contrasts with a decrease in the maternal mortality ratio seen in Mexico between 2018 and 2019. The researchers

found that COVID-19 was the leading cause of maternal death during the study period. The lethality of COVID-19 in this group was notably higher than that for the United States. There was also an increase in deaths related to hemorrhage and hypertension during the study period.

The higher proportion of COVID-19 deaths could be attributed to difficulties in getting intensive care access. Other mortality causes, though not directly related to COVID-19, could be due to changes in health care access during the pandemic. Timely and high-quality prenatal and postpartum care can identify and treat health conditions like hypertension that can lead to poorer outcomes. However, the increased demand for care placed a heavy burden on Mexico's health care system, making it challenging for many to get needed care.

This study found that the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased maternal mortality in Mexico. These findings highlight the importance of timely prenatal care and point to web-based and telemedicine's value in improving care when in-person care is limited.

More information: Nina Mendez-Dominguez et al, Maternal mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico: a preliminary analysis during the first year, *BMC Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-021-11325-3](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11325-3)

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