

US deaths of new mothers rose during pandemic, minorities hit hardest

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Expectant U.S. women died in greater numbers during the first year of

the COVID-19 pandemic, either during pregnancy or shortly after giving birth, a new federal study reports.

This increase hit Black women particularly hard. They had a maternal death rate about three times that of [white women](#), according to the [U.S. National Center for Health Statistics study](#).

One-third of U.S. women who died during pregnancy or in the first six weeks after delivery in 2020 were Black, even though Black Americans constitute about 13% of the total U.S. population.

The overall number of maternal deaths went up 14% during the first year of the pandemic, from 754 in 2019 to 861 in 2020. This was fueled largely by the increased rate of maternal deaths among Black and Hispanic women, the report says.

Dr. Denise Jamieson, an obstetrician at Emory University in Atlanta, told The New York Times she was not surprised by the increases.

"We actually said when the lockdown started that we anticipated an increase in maternal deaths, both due to COVID and the responses to COVID," said Jamieson, a member of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' COVID expert group.

Pregnant women are at greater risk for severe COVID-19, but the U.S. health system also failed to adapt to COVID in a way that protected their health while expecting, Jamieson said.

Many doctors stopped seeing patients in person, and hospitals were often so flooded with COVID-19 patients it was hard to find a bed, Jamieson told the Times. Pregnant women taking care of kids at home couldn't get away for checkups.

Also, [COVID vaccines](#) weren't available to these women in 2020.

Other experts said the [stress of the pandemic](#) caused mood disorders, other [mental health problems](#) and substance abuse to increase, which might have contributed to worse outcomes.

The nation's maternal mortality rate reached 23.8 deaths per 100,000 [live births](#) in 2020, up from 20.1 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019.

That rate compares to fewer than two deaths per 100,000 live births in Norway and New Zealand and just below nine deaths per 100,000 live births in France and Canada, according to the Times.

More information: Donna Hoyert, Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2020, (2022). [DOI: 10.15620/cdc:113967](https://doi.org/10.15620/cdc:113967)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has tips for a [healthy pregnancy](#).

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