

# Most pregnancy-related deaths in US are avoidable: CDC

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Four out of five pregnancy-related deaths in the United States could be avoided, a new report by the nation's top public health agency says, as mothers in the country face a comparatively high mortality rate,

especially among Black women.

The study analyzed the cases of around 1,000 women who died between 2017 and 2019 due to pregnancy or related complications, up to a year after childbirth, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

"The report paints a much clearer picture of [pregnancy-related deaths](#) in this country," said Wanda Barfield, director of the CDC's reproductive health division.

Some 22 percent of deaths occurred during pregnancy, 25 percent on the day of delivery or in the following week, and 53 percent up to a year later.

The leading cause identified, in 23 percent of cases, was [mental health problems](#), including suicide or drug overdoses, followed by hemorrhage (14 percent), and heart problems (13 percent).

The deaths were analyzed by local-level expert committees, including gynecologists and [mental health professionals](#), which were tasked with formulating recommendations.

These committees had "access to a diversity of information to fully understand the circumstances surrounding each death and determine whether there was a causal association with pregnancy," the CDC's David Goodman told AFP.

Pregnancy and its consequences can, for example, aggravate a mental illness, make access to psychiatric treatment difficult, or even cause pain leading to substance abuse or self-harm.

A death was considered avoidable if there was "at least a chance" that it

could be avoided by "one or more reasonable changes" within the [health care system](#), or on the part of the patient or her community.

Among the measures recommended to address the problem were furthering access to [health insurance](#), improving pre- and post-natal care, as well as better transportation options to be able to access care.

The maternal death rate has been increasing in the United States for years, and ranks as one of the worst among industrialized nations.

In 2020, it stood at 23.8 deaths per 100,000 births, according to data published in February.

But underneath that figure lies stark inequalities: the death rate per 100,000 births was 55.3 among Black mothers, versus 19.1 for white women.

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