

COVID-19 contributed to a quarter of maternal deaths from 2020 to 2021, report finds

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COVID-19 contributed to a quarter of all U.S. maternal deaths last year and in 2020, according to an oversight report.

The report, released Wednesday morning by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, a nonpartisan government auditing agency, details maternal mortality disparities during the [pandemic](#) and how the coronavirus contributed to overall [maternal deaths](#).

Out of last year's 1,178 reported maternal deaths, COVID-19 contributed to 401, according to the report. In 2020, the virus was behind almost 12% of maternal deaths.

COVID-19 contributed to roughly 25% of the more than 2,000 maternal deaths in the two years combined.

Pregnant people are more vulnerable to adverse COVID-19 outcomes, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said. During the pandemic, maternal deaths saw a sharp rise and disparities widened. A staggering number of those deaths were preventable, according to the CDC.

Though the report doesn't break down COVID-19 deaths among pregnant people by race and ethnicity, the authors noted the overall widening disparities amid the pandemic.

Hispanic and Latina women saw a significant surge in deaths: Their rate jumped from 12.6 to 18 deaths per 100,000 between 2019 and the first year of the pandemic to almost 28 deaths per 100,000 last year. Black women also are still dying at almost three times the rate of white mothers, and Indigenous women are more than twice as likely to die.

COVID-19 can contribute to pregnancy complications, severe illness and [death](#), the report says. Research has shown pregnant Hispanic women make up a larger portion of COVID-19 cases compared with non-Hispanic pregnant women.

Dr. Maureen G. Phipps, CEO of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, told USA TODAY in a statement that the data confirms expectations that the pandemic would worsen a national maternal death crisis.

"These new data through 2021 give us cause for serious concern with significant increases in maternal deaths among Black and Latino individuals as well as increases in mortality overall," she said, noting structural racism and historic inequities in access to care play major roles in the disparities.

The GAO's analysis was commissioned by Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney, chairwoman of the U.S. House Oversight and Reform Committee, and Rep. Lauren Underwood, co-chair of the Black Maternal Health Caucus, who introduced the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021. It's the first of a three-part GAO analysis of maternal deaths in the United States.

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