

States that restrict abortions have more maternal, infant deaths

December 14 2022, by Cara Murez



In U.S. states with more restrictive abortion policies, rates of pregnant

women, new mothers and infants dying were higher, a new report finds.

The [analysis](#), conducted by the Commonwealth Fund, found that states with heavily restricted access to abortion in 2020 had a maternal death rate that was 62% higher than states with easier abortion access.

"It's important to keep the issue in the forefront, because then that continues to bring it to awareness for everyday people so that people that are suffering from these inequities are not suffering in the shadows," [Dr. Laurie Zephyrin](#), [senior vice president](#) for advancing [health equity](#) at the Commonwealth Fund, told *NBC News*. "And hopefully, it'll help drive [policy change](#)."

Study data came from the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention and the Guttmacher Institute, an abortion rights research and [advocacy group](#) that has an index on levels of abortion access, *NBC News* reported.

Some groups—including people of color, uninsured residents and low-income individuals—already had higher health risks during pregnancy, Zephyrin said. This includes difficulty accessing consistent care during their pregnancies and after their babies are born, *NBC News* reported.

"Then, on top of all that, you're adding this variation in abortion services, reproductive health services, by states," Zephyrin said. "We're just adding on to an already fractured system."

Other state policies may affect [maternal mortality](#), including restrictions on Medicaid coverage and fewer ob-gyns and nurse midwives per capita.

About 39% of counties in states with the most restrictive abortion access are "maternity care deserts," according to the report.

In these states with stricter abortion access, about 44% of birth-related services are paid for by Medicaid, coverage that typically ends 60 days after a woman gives birth. Some states extended that to 12 months in 2020.

Most [maternal deaths](#) happen within the first year of birth, according to a CDC [study](#). In that, researchers estimated 80% of pregnancy-related deaths were preventable.

A Tulane University [study](#) last year showed similar associations between higher maternal/[infant mortality](#) and abortion restrictions, based on data from 2015 to 2018.

"The general pattern of differences" in health outcomes "has remained consistent" over time, according to the Commonwealth Fund report.

The situation may be worsened by the U.S. Supreme Court's June decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, according to the report.

Experts say some doctors may be reluctant to work in states that they see as restricting their ability to do their jobs, *NBC News* reported.

"I think the bottom line is that you take space with these existing deficits, right? And then you have these further restrictions on reproductive health care," Zephyrin said. "You know, there's the potential of even further disrupting the health care system."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [maternal mortality](#).

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