

# American women need more maternity leave, access to pregnancy care: Poll

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Pregnancy is a difficult and potentially dangerous time in a woman's life,

and U.S. women say they aren't getting the support they need while they're expecting, a new HealthDay/Harris Poll has found.

Nearly 2 in 5 women who are pregnant or have ever been pregnant (37%) say they have experienced barriers to getting needed care.

Worse, women in their prime childbearing years (18 to 34) are more than twice as likely as those who are 35 and older to say they encountered barriers to needed [health care](#) during pregnancy and birth—74% versus 28%.

The most common barrier they cite is an inability to make doctor's appointments because of they are unable to take time off work or find child care.

One in 5 women overall (19%)—and 2 in 5 between 18 and 34 (39%)—cite that as a reason they didn't get the care they needed, [poll results](#) showed.

As a result, women are nearly unanimous in their support for paid [maternity leave](#) and better health care in pregnancy:

- Nine in 10 women (92%) think maternity leave is crucial for improving mothers' health outcomes, including 64% who strongly agree.
- Nine in 10 women (91%) also think maternity leave is key to improving babies' health outcomes, including 61% who strongly agree.
- More than 4 in 5 women (86%) say more must be done to make giving birth in the U.S. safer for mothers, with 47% strongly agreeing.

The poll, of 2,040 U.S. adults, was conducted online in early May. It's

accurate to within plus or minus 2.7 percentage points.

"It is interesting that the average American as represented in the poll, understands the need to address paid family [medical leave](#)," said Dr. Veronica Gillispie-Bell, head of women's services for Ochsner Medical Center-Kenner in Kenner, La.

"It will be interesting to see if elected officials provide the same support," she said. "It would appear that [political decisions](#) being made are not representative of what Americans overwhelmingly want."

In fact, the HealthDay/Harris poll found that women agree with Gillispie-Bell's take on today's politics.

Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) say the current political environment has made pregnancy and childbirth more dangerous for women, with 2 in 5 (40%) strongly agreeing.

The [poll](#) also finds that a large number of Americans are unaware that the United States has some of developed world's highest rates of maternal and infant death:

- Overall, the U.S. maternal death rate is 23.8 deaths per 100,000 [live births](#). Among Black Americans, that rises to 55.3 deaths per 100,000, according to a 2022 report from the Commonwealth Fund.
- That rate is far higher than those in Canada (8.4 deaths per 100,000 live births); France (7.6); Switzerland (7); the United Kingdom (6.5); Norway (3.7); Germany (3.6); and Japan (2.7).
- But only 2 in 5 Americans polled (40%) agree that the U.S. has the highest maternal death rate among developed countries. About 1 in 4 (24%) incorrectly believe it doesn't.
- The same goes for [infant mortality](#)—the death of an infant

before their first birthday.

- The U.S. infant death rate is 5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births, according to the Commonwealth Fund—higher than Canada (4.5); the U.K. (3.6); France (3.6); Switzerland (3.2); Germany (3.1); Japan (1.8); or Norway (1.6).
- Nevertheless, just over 1 in 4 Americans polled know that the U.S. does not have one of the lowest infant death rates. Nearly 2 in 5 (37%) incorrectly believe it does.

"Even though most Americans don't know that the U.S. has the highest rate of maternal mortality among developed countries, the vast majority agree that more needs to be done to make giving birth in the U.S. safer for mothers—including nearly half who strongly agree with this sentiment—suggesting that, despite gaps in awareness of key facts when it comes to maternal and infant mortality, there exists a widespread belief that the 'status quo' is simply not good enough," said Kathy Steinberg, vice president of media and communications research at the Harris Poll.

Gillispie-Bell, an expert for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, agreed that more must be done to shine a spotlight on maternal and [infant death](#) rates.

"While we have sounded the alarm on maternal mortality, we need more attention given to this issue in national and [mainstream media](#), including the disparities in outcomes for Black women," Gillispie-Bell said.

"National organizations like the CDC that have raised awareness are not reaching the average American."

**More information:** The Commonwealth Fund has more on [maternal death rates in the United States](#).



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