

# Researchers say maternal serum alpha-fetoprotein levels higher in Black than White women

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Maternal serum alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) levels are higher in Black than White pregnant women, supporting the use of accounting for these differences in prenatal open neural tube defect (ONTD) screening, according to a study [published](#) online May 23 in *Clinical Chemistry*.

Geralyn Messerlian, Ph.D., from the Women & Infants Hospital and the Alpert Medical School at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and colleagues conducted a [retrospective analysis](#) on deidentified prenatal screening records to compare ONTD screening performance with and without accounting for race.

A sample of 13,316 records for analysis had an ultrasound-confirmed [gestational age](#) between 15 and 21 completed weeks, singleton pregnancy, and self-reported race.

The researchers found that AFP levels for pregnancies were higher in Black than White individuals (6 to 11% depending on gestational age). Similar screen-positive rates were seen for self-reported White and Black individuals in race-specific gestation age and maternal weight analyses at 0.74 versus 1.00%, respectively. However, in race-agnostic analyses, the screen-positive rate was 2.4 times higher in Black than White individuals.

"Our results, together with existing professional recommendations and other current publications, endorse the continued use of self-reported [race](#) in prenatal serum screening," the authors write.

**More information:** Geralyn Messerlian et al, Use of maternal race and weight provides equitable performance in serum screening for open neural tube defects, *Clinical Chemistry* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/clinchem/hvae053](#)

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