

b. Maternal Mortality, Pregnancy-Related Mortality, and Severe Maternal Morbidity – Current Trends in the General United States Population

Despite advances in medical knowledge, the U.S. has the unfortunate distinction of having rising numbers of maternal deaths^b as well as rising pregnancy-related mortality^c and severe maternal morbidity^d (SMM) rates. In 2021, there were 1,205 maternal deaths in the U.S. compared with 861 in 2020 and 754 in 2019. The maternal mortality rate for 2021 was 32.9 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared with a rate of 23.8 in 2020 and 20.1 in 2019.⁽¹¹⁾ Likewise, since the implementation of the Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System, the number of reported pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. increased from 7.2 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1987 to 17.6 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019.⁽¹²⁾

These deaths are distributed unequally across all pregnant patients in the U.S. Notable disparities exist both for differences in rates of pregnancy-related deaths among differing racial and ethnic groups as well as for birthing persons living in rural versus more urban areas. For example, during 2017–19, there were 62.8 deaths per 100,000 live births among non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander persons, 39.9 deaths per 100,000 live births among non-Hispanic Black persons, and 32.0 deaths per 100,000 live births among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native persons. In contrast, there were significantly lower rates in other ethnic and racial groups, including 14.1 deaths per 100,000 live births among non-Hispanic White persons, 12.8 deaths per 100,000 live births among non-Hispanic Asian persons, and 11.6 deaths per 100,000 live births among Hispanic persons.⁽¹²⁾ Over the same period of 2017–19, leading causes of pregnancy-related deaths included cardiovascular conditions (excluding cardiomyopathy), infection or sepsis, cardiomyopathy, hemorrhage, thromboembolic events, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (HDP), amniotic fluid embolism,

^b Maternal Death: A maternal death is defined by the World Health Organization as “the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and the site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes.”
(<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.pdf>)

Maternal Mortality Rate: The number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births

^c Pregnancy Related Mortality: A death during or within one year of pregnancy, from a pregnancy complication, a chain of events initiated by pregnancy, or the aggravation of an unrelated condition by the physiologic effects of pregnancy. (<https://reviewtoaction.org/learn/definitions>); Pregnancy Related Mortality Ratio: Pregnancy-related death (per above definition) per 100,000 live births

^d Severe Maternal Morbidity: SMM includes unexpected outcomes of labor and delivery that result in significant short- or long-term consequences to a woman’s health.
(https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/severematernalmorbidity.html#anchor_R_eferences) Severe maternal morbidity: screening and review. Obstetric Care Consensus No. 5. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Obstet Gynecol 2016;128:e54–60.; NB: this document has aimed for inclusive language, however specific terms including maternal death and maternal mortality rate that incorporate “maternal” are not wholly interchangeable with “pregnancy” because of differences in definitions of these terms, so in these cases maternal has not been changed for a more sex neutral term.