

Maternal Health refers to a pregnant woman’s health and wellbeing before, during, and after pregnancy and encompasses aspects of physical, mental, emotional, and social health. Maternal health also includes the absence of maternal morbidity (health conditions that complicate pregnancy and childbirth or that have a negative impact on a person’s health and wellbeing), severe maternal morbidity (outcomes of labor and birth that result in significant negative short- or long-term consequences to a woman’s health), and maternal mortality (the death of a woman directly related to complications of pregnancy, birth, or within 12 months of giving birth).

The United States has the worst maternal mortality rate out of any high-income country.¹ Maternal mortality rates in the United States have seen significant annual increases across all racial groups since 2018, when 658 women died at a rate of 17.4 deaths (per 100k live births). In 2021, 1,205 women died at a rate of 32.9 (per 100k live births).²

Racial Disparities

In the United States, Black pregnant women are significantly more likely to die due to complications of pregnancy, birth, or within 12 months of giving birth than White or Hispanic women. In 2021, 362 Black women died at a rate of 69.9 deaths (per 100k live births) compared to the national rate of 32.9. By comparison, Hispanic women died at a rate of 28.0 and White women at a rate of 26.6.²

Age Disparities

Pregnant women across all age groups saw significant increases in maternal mortality. The risk of maternal mortality increases significantly in pregnant women aged 40+, with 188 women dying in 2021 at a rate of 138.5 (per 100k live births), compared to rates of 31.3 in women aged 25-39 and 20.4 in persons aged <25 years.

Black pregnant women in every age group are exponentially more likely to die, with Black women aged 40+ dying at a rate of 300.8, compared to rates of 69.3 in those aged 25-39 and 41.5 in those aged <25 years. By comparison, White and Hispanic pregnant women aged 40+ saw maternal mortality rates of 126.9 and 86.4, respectively.²

Income Disparities

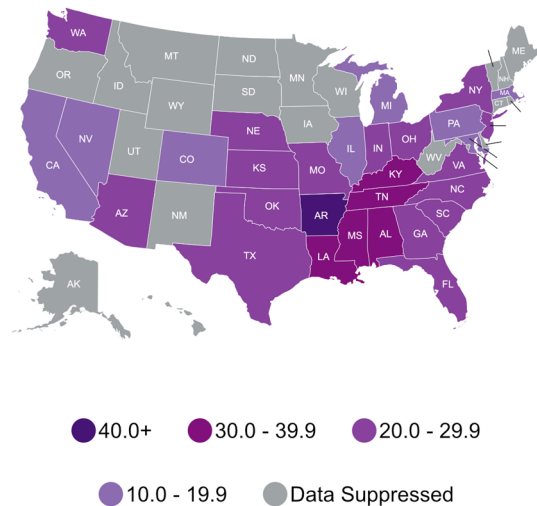
Very few studies have examined the relationship between income and maternal mortality. What research does exist seems to indicate that income levels have interesting impacts on maternal health:

Pregnant women who have higher incomes are likelier to have their first birth at an older age than those with lower incomes, increasing the risk of complications and mortality. Additionally, pregnant women with higher incomes are more likely to experience multiple births (i.e., twins, triplets, et cetera) which which increases the risk of maternal mortality and suggests that they may have utilized fertility assistance to conceive.

Despite these differences, race is more likely to impact maternal mortality rates than income. When examining the highest-income Black families, both infant and maternal health outcomes are worse than the very poorest White families.³

Regional Disparities

Maternal mortality rates are highest in the American South, with Arkansas having the highest mortality rate of 40.4 in 2018-2020, compared to the national rate of 20.4. California had the lowest, with a rate of 10.2. Maternal mortality data were suppressed for twenty states and the District of Columbia due to a small number of deaths, making the data unreliable, or in order to protect patient identities.



References

¹Gunja, M.Z., Gumas, E.D., & Williams, R.D. III. (2022, December 01). *The U.S. Maternal Mortality Crisis Continues to Worsen: An International Comparison.* <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2022/us-maternal-mortality-crisis-continues-worsen-international-comparison>

²Hoyert, D.L. (2023, March 16). *Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2021.* <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.htm>

³Kennedy-Moulton, K., Miller, S., Persson, P., Rossin-Slater, M., Wherry, L., & Aldana, G. (2022, November). *MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH INEQUALITY: NEW EVIDENCE FROM LINKED ADMINISTRATIVE DATA.* https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w30693/w30693.pdf

⁴Kaiser Family Foundation. (n.d.). *Maternal deaths and mortality rates per 100,000 live births.* <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/maternal-deaths-and-mortality-rates-per-100000-live-births/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22collId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22,%22asc%22,%22>