

Women's Health: Maternal Health



Report by
Paige Hofschire

Updated May 2025

Victoria Pilotti, Ed.D., Lana Perlowitz, Tracey Robinson & Hasina Karki-Deertz

Maternal Health

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Maternal Health

What is maternal health?

https://www.who.int/health-topics/maternal-health#tab=tab_1

- Maternal health refers to the health of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period.
- Each stage should be a positive experience, ensuring women and their babies reach their full potential for health and well-being.

Facts About Maternal Health

- Approximately **810** women die every day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth
- **94%** of all maternal deaths occur in low and lower middle-income countries
- Young adolescents (ages 10-14) face a *higher risk of complications* and death as a result of pregnancy than other women

<https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>

Where do maternal deaths occur?

- Women in *less developed countries*, on average, have many more pregnancies than women in developed countries, and their lifetime risk of death due to pregnancy is higher
 - In high income countries, this is 1 in 5400, versus 1 in 45 in low income countries

<https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>

Why do women die?

- Women die as a result of complications during and following pregnancy and childbirth. Most complications develop during pregnancy and most are preventable or treatable.
- The major complications that occur for *nearly 75% of all maternal deaths* are:
 - Severe bleeding (mostly bleeding after childbirth)
 - Infections (usually after childbirth)
 - High blood pressure during pregnancy
 - Complications from delivery
 - Unsafe abortion

How are complications preventable?

- It is particularly important that all births are attended by skilled health professionals, as timely management and treatment can make the difference between life and death for the mother as well as for the baby.
- For severe bleeding, injecting oxytocics immediately after childbirth effectively reduces the risk of bleeding.
- For infection after childbirth , good hygiene practice and early signs of infections being detected can allow treatment in a timely manner.
- For pre-eclampsia, it must be detected and appropriately managed before the onset of convulsions. This can be helped with drugs like magnesium sulfate
- To avoid maternal death, preventing unwanted pregnancies is also vital, meaning all women need access to contraception, safe abortion services to the full extent of the law, and quality post-abortion care

<https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>

Main Factors In Their Way

- The main factors that prevent women from receiving or seeking care during pregnancy and childbirth are:
 - Poverty
 - Distance to families
 - Lack of information
 - Inadequate and poor quality services
 - Cultural beliefs and practices

To Prevent Maternal Deaths

- address inequalities in access to and quality of reproductive, maternal, and newborn health care services
- ensure universal health coverage for comprehensive reproductive, maternal, and newborn health care
- address all causes of maternal mortality, reproductive and maternal morbidities, and related disabilities;
- strengthen health systems to collect high quality data in order to respond to the needs and priorities of women and girls; and
- ensure accountability in order to improve quality of care and equity.

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)**

Office on Women's Health

Office of Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH)

Maternal Health

HHS' Vision for Maternal Health

HHS announced its vision for ensuring the U.S. is one of the safest countries in the world for women to give birth.

In order to realize this vision, America's women and their families need a health care system they can rely on – a health care system that delivers care that is safe, high quality, and evidence-based – and strong communities to draw upon for support. They need a holistic approach to care that proactively identifies risk factors for poor maternal health outcomes (e.g., medical conditions, behaviors, or life circumstances) and engages a comprehensive set of resources, including clinical, behavioral, and social supports, to help mothers and their babies attain optimal pregnancy, birth, and post-delivery outcomes.

Downloadable PDF Documents:

[HHS Maternal Health Action Plan](#) & [HHS Maternal Health Action Plan Summary](#)

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/initiative-to-improve-maternal-health>

HHS Initiative to Improve Maternal Health

- The Department of Health & Human Services' Action Plan for improving maternal health is organized around four goals and three targets. Each of the four goals includes multiple objectives and action items to drive progress.
- The Action Plan also describes the current state of maternal health outcomes in the U.S., challenges in reducing maternal mortality and morbidity, recent efforts to improve maternal health within and beyond the federal government, and it discusses various forums in which HHS leadership sought input from key stakeholders.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/initiative-to-improve-maternal-health>

Human Service' Action Plan to Improve for Maternal Health in America

Four Goals:

Goal 1: Healthy Outcomes for All Women of Reproductive Age

Objective 1.1 Improve prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease for women of reproductive age by more effectively controlling blood pressure and preventing hypertension

Objective 1.2 Encourage evidence-based preventive and disease management services for other significant medical risk factors

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/maternalhealth>

Human Service' Action Plan to Improve for Maternal Health in America

Goal 2: Healthy Pregnancies and Births

Objective 2.1 Align provider payment with positive outcomes and quality improvement achievements, such as reducing low-risk cesarean deliveries

Objective 2.2 Support efforts to expand adoption of evidence-based clinical best practices in maternal health and obstetrics

Objective 2.3 Improve access to high-quality prenatal care and delivery services for at-risk populations

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/maternalhealth>

Human Service' Action Plan to Improve for Maternal Health in America

Goal 3: Healthy Futures

Objective 3.1 Improve the quality of, and access to, postpartum care, especially mental health and substance use services

Objective 3.2 Improve infant health outcomes by promoting the development of strong parent-child relationships

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/maternalhealth>

Human Services' Action Plan to Improve for Maternal Health in America

Goal 4: Improve Data and Bolster Research

Objective 4.1 Enhance maternal health surveillance by improving data collection transparency, timeliness, and standardization, to be able to stratify by risk factors

Objective 4.2 Advance a research agenda to identify effective, evidence-based best practices in maternal health, including those addressing clinical, environmental, and socioeconomic factors

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/maternalhealth>

Human Services' Action Plan to Improve for Maternal Health in America

Three targets:

Target 1: Reduce the maternal mortality rate by 50 percent in 5 years.

Target 2: Reduce the low-risk cesarean delivery rate by 25 percent in 5 years.

Target 3: Achieve blood pressure control in 80 percent of women of reproductive age with hypertension in 5 years.

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/maternalhealth>

Every Mother Counts

MATERNAL HEALTH

Maternal Health

Respectful, Equitable Care

- Despite spending more money per capita on maternal health than any country in the world, the U.S. ranks a 55th in maternal deaths. It is the only high-resource nation with a consistently rising maternal mortality rate, and disparities are rampant.
- The majority of maternal deaths in the U.S. can be prevented by timely access to respectful, equitable care.
- *Every Mother Counts* focuses on expanding access to community-based and culturally relevant, models that are proven to lead to excellent outcomes and compassionate, respectful care, including the midwifery model of care and community-based doula and peer-to-peer support.

<https://everymothercounts.org/the-issue/>

Midwives and Doulas

Midwives have medical training and during the birth process, focus on delivering a healthy baby.

Doulas, on the other hand, focus on the needs of the mother, offering mental, physical, and emotional support. **Doulas** do not have medical training or experience and cannot substitute for a midwife or doctor. Postpartum doulas help a new mother as she recovers from the birthing process. This includes caring for the infant and guiding a mother through the breastfeeding process.

https://www.medicinenet.com/doula_vs_midwife/article.htm

<https://www.healthline.com/health/pregnancy/doula-vs-midwife#doula>

Resources

- **Planned Parenthood of Greater New York Services:**
 - <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-greater-new-york/get-care/our-services>
- **Choices Women's Medical Center:**
 - <https://www.choicesmedical.com>
- **Infant and Maternal Health in New York City:**
 - <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/infant-maternal-health-in-new-york-city/>
 - <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cccnewyork.org/2020/12/CCC-Infant-Maternal-Heath-One-Sheet-final.pdf>
- **Maternal health is a human right:**
 - <https://everymothercounts.org/the-issue/>
- **American Black Women Face Disproportionately High Rates of Maternal Mortality:**
PBS News Hour
 - <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/american-black-women-face-disproportionately-high-rates-of-maternal-mortality#:~:text=And%20it%20is%20particularly%20bad,regardless%20of%20income%20or%20education>

Contact Us

Website: cwny.org

Email: info@cwny.org



Queens Borough Hall
120-55 Queens Boulevard
Room 325
Kew Gardens, NY 11424
(718) 793-0672

Fort Totten Park
207 Totten Avenue
Bayside, NY 11359
(718) 229-0020

Follow Us on Social Media

Facebook

Center for the Women of New York

TWITTER X

@centerwomenNY

Instagram

@centerwomenny

YouTube

Center for the Women of New York