

*U.S. maternal deaths up 100% in 20 years with highest rate among African Americans*

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Washington, July 6 (RHC)-- Maternal deaths across the United States have more than doubled over the past two decades, with African American women dying at the highest rate, a new study has unveiled.

Black mothers died at the nation's highest rates, while the largest increases in deaths were found in American Indian and Native Alaskan mothers, according to the study published Monday in the Journal of the American Medical Association. It further noted that some U.S. states — and racial or ethnic minority groups within them — fared worse than other groups.

Researchers conducting the study looked at maternal deaths between 1999 and 2019 — but not the pandemic spike — for every state and five racial and ethnic groups. "It's a call to action to all of us to understand the root causes — to understand that some of it is about health care and access to health care, but a lot of it is about structural racism and the policies and procedures and things that we have in place that may keep people from being healthy," said Dr. Allison Bryant, one of the study's authors and a senior medical director for health equity at Mass General Brigham.

According to the report, among wealthy nations the U.S. has the highest rate of maternal mortality, which is defined as a death during pregnancy or up to a year afterward. Common causes include excessive bleeding, infection, heart disease, suicide and drug overdose.

African American women had the greatest median maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births, which had tripled in certain northeastern states over two decades, the study found.

In the state of Arkansas, Black females have a twofold higher likelihood of experiencing pregnancy-related fatalities compared to white females, according to a 2021 state report.

Dr. William Greenfield, the head physician overseeing family well-being at the Arkansas Department of Health, stated that the discrepancy is substantial and has "endured consistently" over the years. He also added that it is challenging to precisely determine the reasons behind the surge in the maternal mortality rate for Black mothers in the state. "Most of the deaths we reviewed and other places have reviewed ... were preventable," Greenfield said.

The authors of the report also emphasized the importance of comprehending these discrepancies in order to concentrate on solutions that are rooted in the community and to ascertain the necessary resources to address the issue.

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