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Data Driven Look into Why Lousisana and Georgia Produced the Highest

Amount of Maternal Mortality for Black Women in 2019

### What do Beyonce and Serena Williams both have in common? Other than being successful and world-known phenomenons, they both have experienced life-threatening complications in their pregnancies. Similarly to them, it's reported that black women across all income spectrums and walks of life are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women. This disparity often stems from reported communication gaps, stereotyping, and negligence that this demographic experienced from health care providers that led to differential treatment and maternal mortality. Shockingly, more than a third of these pregnancy-related deaths of black women were caused by mistreatment or misdiagnosis of biological conditions, according to a [2019 Center for Disease Control and Prevention report](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html) (CDC).

### The [2019 CDC report](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html) defines a pregnancy-related death as “the death of a woman during pregnancy or within one year of the end 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.” According to the report, pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births for black women that were older than 30 years old were “four to five times as high as it was for white women.” Even in states with the lowest maternal mortality rate, significant differences still were evident. Unfortunately, black women being either biologically disposed or socio-economically mistreated in the healthcare system in the U.S. is a rising epidemic today; however, it’s a nuanced perspective to discuss what region of the country produced the most pregnancy-related death for this minority group in 2019.

Though the nation's overall maternal mortality rate was high in 2019 for black women—the highest it's been in decades—some states' rates were reported to be far worse. According to [nytimes](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/07/health/pregnancy-deaths-.html), **Louisiana** and **Georgia** are the top 2 states in the nation where black women experienced higher pregnancy related deaths in 2019. According to nytimes, Georgia's maternal mortality rate was especially shocking for black women, “who had a rate of 66.6 per 100,000 live births—compared to 43.2 for white women—between the ages of 35 and 44, with a rate of nearly 90 deaths per 100,000 live births.” Similarly, in Louisiana, the racial gap in maternal mortality was even more alarming, with a rate of 72.6 per 100,000 live births for black women compared to 27.3 for white women.

According to [ameicashealthranking.org](https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/maternal_mortality_a/state/ALL), researchers in the [2019 CDC report](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html) suggested a number of potential reasons for the significant disparities in these southern states during 2019. Predominantly, researchers noted that several chronic diseases were associated with higher risk for pregnancy-related deaths, like hypertension, amongst black women. Also, Losuisana and Georgia are two southern states where systemic factors, such as “gaps in access to health care and preventive care, a lack of care coordination and social services, and community factors, such as inadequate housing or transportation”, report to being the highest disparities that black women faced in 2019.

According to the researchers, “black women are more likely to receive obstetric care in hospitals with lower quality ratings than white women.” To better address these biological and systemic factors that black women faced at high n 2019, these researchers suggest for the healthcare systems in Georgia and Louisiana to one, implement better standardized protocols and training in quality improvement efforts and two, implement better facilities that serve these disproportionately affected communities.

Unfortunately, a new study from the [Obstetrics and Gynecology](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5915910/), suggests that more than half of pregnancy-related deaths among black women in Louisiana specifically may have been preventable in 2019 if these systematic efforts were better in place. The study concluded that Black women were “4.1 times as likely as white women to die while pregnant or within 42 days of childbirth” from complications like blood loss, cardiomyopathy and heart disease in Louisiana during 2019—and the time, the state said 45% of all pregnancy-related deaths were preventable.

On a nationwide scale, the CDC is fortunately working hard to ensure that black women in certain disenfranchised populations—and women of color at large across the U.S.—are receiving better treatment in the healthcare system and better access to it. The CDC has awarded more than $45 million over the past five years to support the work of Maternal Mortality Review (MMR) through the [Enhancing Reviews and Surveillance to Eliminate Maternal Mortality (ERASE MM)](https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/erase-mm/index.html) program. According to CDC, this investment will provide over “$9 million a year to 24 recipients representing 25 states.” Moreover, the director of the CDC’s Division of Reproductive Health, Wanda Barfield, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.A.P., recently stated in the CDC report,“New funds will increase the capacity and stability of Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRCs) to improve consistency and quality in data collection while ensuring the identification of prevention strategies.”

Pregnancy-related deaths are in fact an inevitable occurrence that happened to black women at higher rates in 2019 due to predisposed biological and systemic factors. Moreover, it is unfortunate that **Louisiana** and **Georgia** are the top 2 states in the nation where black women experienced higher pregnancy-related deaths during that year; however, latest research and studies suggest that better preventative measures could have been taken place to prevent over half of these maternal mortality reported in Louisiana specifically. Fortunately, more awareness and implementation of these preventative measures today can limit or reduce the pregnancy-related deaths that will happen to black women in the near future not only in Louisiana and Georgia, but across the nation.

Sources:

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