



## Facts About Maternal Suicide

### Suicide Rates as Compared to Other Maternal Deaths

- Although there is no national reporting of maternal suicide rates, from state data it is thought that suicide is one of the leading causes of maternal death in the US<sup>1,2</sup> and is the leading cause of death in countries such as Japan<sup>3</sup>, the UK<sup>4</sup>, and Ireland.<sup>5</sup>
- Suicide accounts for up to 20% of postpartum deaths.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Suicide is a leading cause of maternal death in the first year following childbirth.<sup>8</sup>
- Maternal suicide deaths are more common than maternal deaths caused by postpartum hemorrhage or hypertensive disorders.<sup>9</sup>
- Looking at data from 14 state maternal mortality review committees, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes mental health conditions (including suicide) are the 6<sup>th</sup> leading cause of pregnancy-related death\*.<sup>10</sup>
- Suicide is among the top three causes of pregnancy-associated deaths<sup>†</sup>, as defined by the CDC.<sup>7</sup>
- In a review of Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRC) data in 14 states, mental health conditions, including suicide and overdose, were the underlying cause of 8.8% of pregnancy-related deaths.<sup>11</sup>

### Maternal Suicide Risk

- Sleep disturbances can increase risk of suicide in depressed postpartum moms.<sup>12</sup>
- The severity and rapidly evolving nature of postpartum psychosis increases the risk of maternal suicide.<sup>13</sup>
- Maternal suicide risk is not limited to the immediate postpartum period. It is important to continue providing women with mental health resources and support throughout the later postpartum period.<sup>14</sup>
- Though it can happen anytime during pregnancy and the postpartum period, one study found that maternal suicide was most frequently completed between 6 to 12 months postpartum.<sup>14</sup>
- Pregnancy does not protect against the risk of psychiatric disorders or suicide and the postpartum period has been identified as a vulnerable time for increased risk for mental health issues.<sup>2</sup>
- Previous suicide attempts and thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) can be risk factors for maternal suicide completion.<sup>7</sup>

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\***Pregnancy-related death:** 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.

†**Pregnancy-associated death:** A death during or within one year of pregnancy, regardless of the cause. These deaths make up the universe of maternal mortality; within that universe are pregnancy-related deaths and pregnancy-associated, but not related deaths.



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- Depressed postpartum women who experienced childhood physical abuse are at significantly increased risk for frequent thoughts of self-harm.<sup>12</sup>

### **Suicidal Ideation (Thoughts About Suicide)**

- Increased symptoms of anxiety have been linked to frequent thoughts of self-harm in depressed postpartum women.<sup>12</sup>
- 5-14% of women have thoughts about suicide during pregnancy and/or the postpartum period.<sup>6</sup>
- During pregnancy suicide is an uncommon event, however thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) are relatively common among pregnant women.<sup>15</sup>
- Depression during pregnancy greatly increases thoughts about suicide while pregnant.<sup>7</sup>
- Complications during pregnancy are associated with having thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideations) during the postpartum period.<sup>16</sup>
- Women who had positive depression screens during the early postpartum period were more likely to have thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideations) during the later postpartum period.<sup>16</sup>
- Early identification of suicidal thoughts (ideation) is essential<sup>17</sup>, as research has shown that 74% of postpartum women who died by drugs or suicide made more than 1 emergency department or hospital visit between their delivery and death.<sup>14</sup>

### **Maternal Suicide and Race**

- Asian women are nearly 9 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.<sup>17</sup>
- Black women are 2 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.<sup>17</sup>
- Latina women are almost 2 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.<sup>17</sup>
- Women who self-report as “other race” are almost 3 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.<sup>17</sup>
- According to death records from The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), pregnancy-associated suicide is more likely to occur in older and non-Hispanic White women.<sup>18</sup>
- Pregnancy-associated suicide was less likely to occur in non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women compared to non-Hispanic white women.<sup>18</sup>



## Facts About Maternal Suicide

### References

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## Facts About Maternal Suicide

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