| CA-PMSS

Pregnancy-Related Mortality – 2019-2021

The California Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System (CA-PMSS) provides the most accurate information on California's pregnancy-related mortality – a key measure of population health. CA-PMSS defines pregnancy-related deaths as deaths during pregnancy or within one year of the end of pregnancy from causes directly related to or worsened by pregnancy or its management, excluding accidental or incidental causes (suicide, homicide, drug overdose, or other injury). In 2019-2021, California had 1.28 million births and 226 pregnancy-related deaths.

By the Numbers

21.6 ▲
pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021

COVID-19
current leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths

175% ▲
increase in pregnancy-related deaths from infection
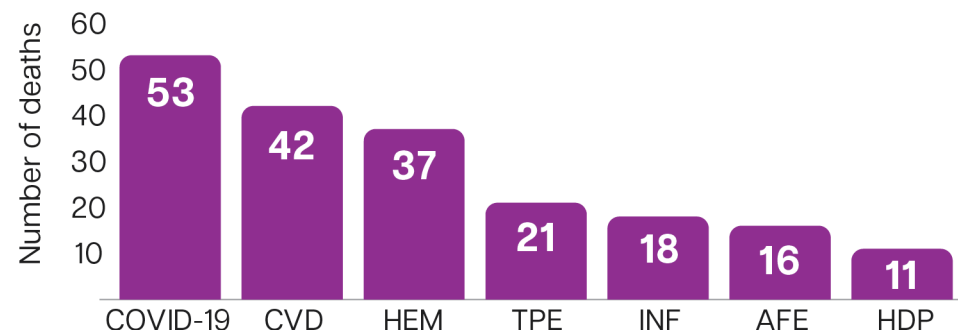
Pregnancy-Related Mortality in 2021

California's rate of pregnancy-related deaths continued to increase in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic:

▸ 1.2 times higher than the rate of 18.6 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020

▸ 1.7 times higher than the rate of 12.8 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019

In 2019-2021, about 1 in 4 pregnancy-related deaths was due to COVID-19.

Leading Causes in 2019-2021

The leading causes of pregnancy-related mortality were COVID-19, cardiovascular disease (CVD), hemorrhage (HEM), thrombotic pulmonary embolism (TPE), other infection (INF), amniotic fluid embolism (AFE), and hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (HDP).

Number of deaths:
COVID-19	CVD	HEM	TPE	INF	AFE	HDP
53	42	37	21	18	16	11

Changing Trends in Causes

California's rate of pregnancy-related deaths from infection increased significantly, largely due to the rise in deaths from COVID-19.

The rate was 5.5 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019-2021:

▸ 2.8 times higher than the rate of 2.0 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016-2018 (before the COVID-19 pandemic)

The rates for other causes of pregnancy-related mortality remained relatively stable.

Disparities by Race and Ethnicity
Trends in 2019-2021

Racial and ethnic disparities in the rate of pregnancy-related deaths decreased in 2019-2021 but persist. The rate for Black birthing people was 49.7 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019–2021:

▶ 2.8 to 3.6 times higher than the rates for White (14.0), Asian (14.4), and Hispanic/Latino birthing people (17.7)

In 2016-2018, the rate of pregnancy-related deaths was 3.4 to 4.3 times higher for Black birthing people.

Disparities by Health Insurance
Medi-Cal & Trends in 2019-2021

The disparity in the rates of pregnancy-related deaths for birthing people with Medi-Cal health coverage and those with private health insurance remained wide in 2019–2021.

The rate for birthing people with Medi-Cal health coverage was 26.0 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019–2021:

▶ 2.7 times higher than the rate of 9.6 deaths per 100,000 live births for birthing people with private insurance

In 2016–2018, the rate of pregnancy-related deaths was 1.6 times higher for birthing people with Medi-Cal health coverage.

Disparities by Community Conditions
Social Determinants & Trends in 2019-2021

The disparity in the rates of pregnancy-related deaths for birthing people living in the least healthy communities* and those living in the healthiest communities widened in 2019–2021.

The rate for those living in the least healthy communities was 27.3 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019–2021:

▶ 3.7 times higher than the rate of 7.4 deaths per 100,000 live births for those living in the healthiest communities

In 2016–2018, the rate of pregnancy-related deaths was 1.7 times higher for birthing people living in the least healthy communities.

*Community conditions were measured using the Healthy Places Index www.healthyplacesindex.org.

For more information please visit go.cdph.ca.gov/pregnancy-related-mortality-dashboard and go.cdph.ca.gov/PMSS.

By the Numbers

2.8–3.6x
Higher
rate of pregnancy-related deaths for Black birthing people

2.7x
Higher
rate of pregnancy-related deaths for those with Medi-Cal health coverage

3.7x
Higher
rate of pregnancy-related deaths for those living in the least healthy communities