TuSalud

Maternal Mortality Among Latinas Spikes

New data show that Latinas are more vulnerable to maternal since the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that Latinas experienced a sharp 44% increase in maternal mortality in 2020.

In 2019, for every 100,000 births, there were 12.6 deaths among Latinas. Just one year later, there were 18.2 deaths per 100,000 among Latinas. Women 40 years and older experienced the highest risk for maternal mortality, according to the CDC report.

Racial disparities in maternal mortality are well documented, but researchers attribute this 44% jump to a combination of longstanding health inequities, such as lack of insurance and language barriers, and COVID-19. Pregnant women are at higher risk for COVID, and many pregnant Latinas are frontline workers and therefore had a higher risk for exposure, particularly during the pre-vaccine phase of the COVID pandemic.

Most maternal deaths, defined as deaths during pregnancy or within 42 days of delivery from any cause related or worsened by the pregnancy, are the result of cardiovascular issues, such as blood clots, conditions related to blood pressure, such as preeclampsia or stroke. For individuals with limited access to quality health care, these preventable health issues could go unnoticed or ignored.

For example, data from the CDC found that from 2007 to 2016, Latina mothers had a higher risk of dying from blood pressure–related issues compared with white or Black women. The COVID pandemic heightened these issues for low-income individuals living in urban areas as hospitals became inundated with patients.

Emma Sanchez-Vaznaugh, a professor in the department of public health at San Francisco State University, said these issues, “served as sort of a ’perfect storm’ that can give rise to more ill health and death in this group.”

Health care professionals, like Patrick Ramsey, PhD, a professor and chief of the division of maternal-fetal medicine at the Long School of Medicine at the University of Texas Health Science

Center at San Antonio, recommend frequent checkups for pregnant Latinas to monitor preventable health issues.

“If you have visits that are spaced out or you don’t go into clinics to have the appropriate assessments done, that disease can become worse than it would have been if you’d come in on a regular basis,” Ramsey said.

Professionals also recommended that women, particularly young women, know their numbers regarding heart health, including total cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar and body mass index.

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