

Racial Gaps in Declining U.S. Prenatal Care

Non-white mothers received delayed or no prenatal care.

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[Prenatal](#) care is the health care people receive while pregnant. This includes physical exams, blood tests and check-ins and is essential for a healthy [pregnancy](#), [according to the Mayo Clinic](#), reducing [infant death at birth](#) by [41%](#). A [recent report](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that prenatal care in the United States declined since 2021, with more people seeking care later or not at all; what's more, the decrease disproportionately affected minority populations.

"We know that early engagement in prenatal care is linked to better overall health outcomes," Clayton Alfonso, MD, an ob-gyn at Duke University in North Carolina, told The [Associated Press \(AP\)](#). When people delay medical care during pregnancy, "we've missed that window to optimize both fetal and maternal care."

The CDC study compared 2024 data on prenatal care timing (first, second or third trimester) to 2021 data. Between 2021 and 2024, first-trimester prenatal care decreased from 78.3% to 75.5%, second trimester care increased from 15.4% to 17.3 % and late (third trimester) or no prenatal care increased from 6.3% to 7.3%

The overall trends show more mothers are receiving prenatal care later in their pregnancy and some are not receiving care at all. The data were also compared for mothers of different races and ethnicities, ages and in different states, which revealed various trends and [disparities](#).

Prenatal care in the first trimester decreased most for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander mothers (8%), followed by Black and Latina mothers (4.6%). Second trimester care increased most for Latina mothers (16%). Receiving late or no prenatal care was highest among Black and Native American mothers (10.9% and 12.9%).

Late or no prenatal care can raise the risk of maternal mortality, which the CDC defines as death during labor or in the 42 days following childbirth. Black women are almost [three times more likely to die during childbirth](#) compared with white women, [according to the CDC](#), though overall maternal mortality has been declining in the United States.

The CDC report found differences between age groups and residents of different states. Late or no prenatal care increased in 36 states and Washington, DC, and for women of all ages. First trimester prenatal care decreased most for mothers under 20, and second trimester care increased most for mothers in their 30s.

The cause of recent declines in early prenatal care is unknown, but the CDC's findings add to growing concern about racial inequities in health care.

To learn more about racial gaps in health care, read:

- [“Stress and Inflammation Explain Half of the Mortality Gap Between Black and White Adults,”](#)
- [“Structural Barriers May Prevent Cancer Care for People Living With HIV,”](#)
- [“Unmet Social Needs Are Linked to Low Trust in Cancer Information From Health Experts”](#) and
- [“More Data Link Medicaid Expansion to Improved Cancer Outcomes and Survival.”](#)