Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Addressing Maternal Mortality in the U.S.—A Pediatrics Responsibility

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In March, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that there were 1205 maternal deaths in 2021 in the US, marking a substantial uptrend from 861 deaths in 2020 and 754 in 2019. This sharp 40% increase in the maternal mortality rate to 32.9 deaths per 100?000 live births from 23.8 per 100?000 in 2020 is striking because the US already had the highest maternal mortality rate among high-income countries. Although 2021 US maternal mortality increased across all racial and ethnic groups, remarkable racial disparities remain. The maternal mortality rate among non-Hispanic Black women climbed to 69.9 deaths per 100?000, 2.6 times that of non-Hispanic White women, a disparity that has persisted for decades. Physicians, even those who do not provide direct health care for pregnant and postpartum patients, have a responsibility to examine ways to help US health care systems address this massive failure to optimize maternal health.

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