

Dear Colleagues,

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [the maternal mortality rate has more than doubled in the United States since 1987](#), and approximately 700 women in the U.S. die each year of complications related to pregnancy. In addition, data shows that [considerable racial and ethnic disparities in pregnancy-related mortality exist in the U.S. which disproportionately impact black women](#). We know that about [60% of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable](#), and these data are an important tool to guide our efforts.

The CDC also estimates that, for every woman who dies during pregnancy, or immediately after, approximately 70 experience a severe complication. This [severe maternal morbidity](#) includes unintended outcomes of labor and delivery that results in significant consequences for a woman's health. Addressing severe maternal morbidity is an important aspect of reducing maternal deaths and improving the health of women during pregnancy and throughout their lives.

April 11th marked the start of national **Black Maternal Health Week**. This health observance is a week of awareness, engagement, and community building intended to extend the national conversation about Black maternal health in an effort to reduce disparities in pregnancy-related deaths in the United States. As part of this health observance, I wanted to highlight several resources available through the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health as well as information about COVID-19 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- **The Office on Women's Health can address [important questions about pregnancy](#)** and share what women can do before, during, and after pregnancy to maintain their health and give their baby a healthy start to life.
- **The Office on Women's Health [It's Only Natural](#) breastfeeding campaign for African-American women** includes resources for African-American women and their families about the health benefits of breastfeeding — not just for babies, but for moms too. The campaign includes facts about breastfeeding and provides practical tips on how to make breastfeeding work, as well as getting the support women need to breastfeed.
- **Many factors influence pregnancy-related health outcomes** and it is important for all women of reproductive age to adopt healthy lifestyles. During [National Minority Health Month](#), the Office of Minority Health is focused on safe ways all communities can stay physically active at home and advance mental and emotional wellness. The campaign encompasses the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) which provide guidance on physical activity for healthy women who are pregnant or postpartum. [A toolkit](#) is available to help promote National Minority Health Month which includes sample social media messages and downloadable graphics to help increase awareness about #NMHM2020 and encourage others to get involved in this effort.

The CDC's Coronavirus (COVID-19) [webpage](#) provides the most updated information on the outbreak and answers to [frequently asked questions](#), including the latest [guidance](#) on COVID-19 related to pregnancy and breastfeeding. Important [guidance](#) for healthcare facilities providing inpatient obstetric care for pregnant patients with confirmed COVID-19 or pregnant persons under investigation (PUI) in inpatient obstetric healthcare settings is also available.

Let's continue to identify and promote efforts that improve maternal health and reduce disparities in pregnancy-related deaths across the United States.

Sincerely,

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