

# Pregnant women succumbing to Delta variant in the US, leaving behind scores of broken families

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Another cruel aspect of the virulent Delta variant is the rate at which pregnant women, largely unvaccinated, are giving birth to their newborn babies desperately ill or as their final act before succumbing to COVID-19.

A number of counties and hospital systems throughout the country are reporting concerning spikes in the numbers of pregnant women admitted to hospital and growing numbers of deaths. Pregnant women infected with the virus have an increased risk of progressing to a more severe illness.

The virulent Delta variant which is spreading quickly throughout the globe is putting increasing numbers of pregnant women in the ICU. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as of Friday August 20, a total of 18,262 pregnant women have been hospitalized from a known 107,532 total cases. More than 14,500 have been placed in intensive care and 10,003 of those have been ventilated. The total number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths among pregnant women stands at 128.

Vaccination rates among pregnant women are alarmingly low, with the CDC reporting on August 11 that only 23 percent have received at least one dose and some 77 percent of expecting women remain unvaccinated.

- First time Florida mother Kristen McMullen, 30, began developing symptoms three weeks prior to her due date. After a four-day hospital stay she was sent home with antibiotics but would return within 48 hours unable to breathe. Upon admittance, doctors performed an emergency C-section as her husband Keith was forced to wait at home. McMullen was able to hold her newborn daughter Summer Reign once before being moved to the ICU moments after giving birth. She then saw her daughter only through FaceTime before dying 10 days later on August 6. She leaves behind her husband Keith and newborn daughter.

- Greyzie Miller, a young Jacksonville mother died August 15 after battling COVID-19 for weeks after giving birth to her baby girl. A fundraiser for her family said Greyzie was 31 weeks pregnant when doctors suggested an emergency cesarean section. Evie Aura Miller was born nine weeks prematurely and placed in the NICU. Greyzie was put into an induced coma with a ventilator which she was on for 17 days before her left lung and then right lung collapsed, and eventually her heart gave out, according to the GoFundMe page. She leaves behind her newborn baby girl, Evie,

her two-year-old son, Silas, and her fiancé, David Miller who was able to take his newborn daughter home the day after Greyzie died.

- An anonymous newborn girl was left orphaned in Mississippi when both the baby's parents died of COVID-19. WBRC Birmingham reported that the unnamed mother was 32 years old and in good health. She was admitted to a Mississippi hospital with COVID-19 complications and died within one week. Her last act was giving birth to her baby girl. The young mother was one of two pregnant women who passed away from COVID-19 in Mississippi last week. The child is receiving emergency pediatric care at University of Alabama at Birmingham. The baby's father also tragically died of the virus, leaving her a ward of the state.

- Pregnant Louisiana mother Lacresanna Williams, 21, of Shreveport, and her 42-year-old mother Victoria Williams died of COVID-19 just one day apart. Lacresanna tested positive for the virus during a routine checkup. The very next day, she died after delivering her baby via emergency C-section. Her aunt, Cassandra Martin, told TV station KSLA that the news sent Williams' mother, Victoria Williams, into a panic. Victoria Williams did not tell her family that she had also contracted COVID-19. The 42-year-old woman died the following day. The infant is Lacresanna's second child, in addition to a 1-year-old baby. Her grandmother, Earlie Williams, told KSLA: "She loses her life and leaves two precious babies here. And right behind her she loses her momma. She left five kids."

- Paige Ruiz, a 32-year-old Fort Worth, Texas mother of two died on August 15. Ruiz was the coordinator of student learning outcomes and federal programs for the Joshua Independent School District. She was due to have her baby on July 30 and she tested positive for COVID-19 just days before, on July 24. Ruiz had to go to the emergency room with difficulty breathing. Doctors performed an emergency C-section on August 2. She was taken off intubation and began to recover before having complications that took her life on August 15. Ruiz's mother Robin Zinsou noted to WFAA "I kept asking her, 'Have you talked to the doctor about getting the vaccine?' and she said, 'No, mom. I'm going to wait until after I have the baby.'" In the two weeks before Ruiz took a turn for the worst, Zinsou recalled, "She texted me and said, 'Mom, I wish I got vaccinated.' ... She was texting her friends and her sisters and said, you know anyone who isn't vaccinated, beg them to get vaccinated." She leaves behind her husband Daniel,

2-year-old daughter Joanna and newborn Celeste.

- Young 24-year-old North Kansas City mother Braxten Goodwin died of COVID-19 two weeks after going into emergency labor. Goodwin's family stated that she had planned to get vaccinated after giving birth. Goodwin leaves behind her 22-month-old daughter Nova and newborn son Levite. Her mother, Tamika Horton, told Fox4 Kansas City, "She wanted to go home. She said I want to go home and before she went to the ICU she was like, she was kind of scared she said. She was scared." Goodwin never got to meet Levite. Soon after he was born she was put on a ventilator and died August 2. Horton said her daughter's last words to her were calling for her daughter Nova.

In Palm Beach, Florida a group of concerned obstetric and gynecological physicians held a rare press briefing on Thursday at the Jupiter Medical Center to urge vaccinations of pregnant women as the hospital has seen anywhere from two to five pregnant patients being admitted to the hospital daily. The physicians, who represented nine practices in the area, reported pregnant or post-partum patients in the ICU over the last six to eight weeks.

Dr. Dudley Brown, Chairman of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department at Jupiter Medical Center told the *Palm Beach Post*, "Given that, my colleagues and I decided we needed to speak to the public on a larger and bigger platform to inform the community about the dangers and about what we are seeing at the hospital affecting our pregnant and non-pregnant patients."

Doctors in Minneapolis, Minnesota, are also reporting concerns of a rise in pregnant women becoming critically ill with COVID-19. Dr. Sarah Cross with University of Minnesota's Masonic Children's Hospital reported to CBS Minnesota that she has seen a marked increase in recent weeks with pregnancy creating a high-risk condition for COVID-19 patients.

Cross emphasized the dangerous situation pregnant mothers are in, noting that "There are a lot of exposures, and pregnant women don't have the luxury, in general, usually, of being able to really isolate themselves."

Dr. Ryan Loftin, who specializes in obstetrics and gynecology and maternal fetal medicine at Allina Health, also expressed concern to CBS Minnesota over a number of breakthrough cases in vaccinated mothers, but noted, "What we are seeing in our numbers is that about 86% of COVID cases that we're seeing in pregnant women are women who are unvaccinated, which fits with what we're seeing nationally." Loftin warned about the danger COVID-19 poses to expectant mothers: "It can be as severe as it is in anyone else, requiring intubation, mechanical ventilation and even including deaths of pregnant women because of severe illness."

Dr. Mark Turrentine, an obstetrics professor at Baylor College of Medicine, who is also the co-chair of a COVID-19 work group for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) told NPR, "We have a highly infectious variant of COVID-19 virus in a group of individuals that the majority are not immunized. So yeah, we are seeing a lot of sick people. ... There is a threefold increase of intensive care unit admission," a "two-and-half-fold increased risk of being put on mechanical ventilation or bypass support, and there's even, you know, a little over a one-and-

a-half-fold increased risk of death."

"I have seen some pregnant women get really sick. I mean, I have seen some die," said Turrentine. "And you know, you go into this business as an obstetrician gynecologist because patients are young and they are healthy. And most of the time you have great outcomes. This is a bad virus."

In Los Angeles, County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer called on pregnant women to get vaccinated this past Monday after a recent 300 percent increase in weekly cases among pregnant women, noting that at least 27 cases of infection with COVID-19 were reported for the week that ended June 27, which jumped to 81 cases that were reported during the week ending July 25. Los Angeles County reported at least 11,264 confirmed COVID-19 cases among pregnant women as of August 10, 12 of whom have died.

Only as of last Wednesday, August 11 did the CDC update its guidelines to strongly recommend all pregnant women get vaccinated in light of rising numbers of unvaccinated pregnant women becoming seriously ill. The agency now warns that pregnant women who contract COVID-19 are more likely to have a severe infection, be hospitalized and require a ventilator. The updated CDC guidance follows a recent analysis of data on 2,500 pregnant women who received at least one dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine prior to 20 weeks of pregnancy. It found no effect on miscarriages which remained within the normal range of 13 percent.

A week prior to the CDC announcement the two leading organizations representing physicians and scientists who specialize in obstetric care—ACOG and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine recommended that all who are pregnant get vaccinated.

A number of families of the deceased report that the majority of the mothers who have passed were hesitant about potential dangers to their pregnancy since pregnant women were not included in vaccine trials. Additionally, families report that individual providers and national agencies have lacked uniformity in vaccine guidance prior to the recent ACOG and CDC recommendations.



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