

# News From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

## Hypertensive Disorders in Pregnancy Are on the Rise

About 1 in 7 US women with a hospital delivery in 2019 had hypertensive disorders in pregnancy (HDP)—the leading cause of maternal deaths—according to a CDC [report](#).

The authors analyzed 2017-2019 data from the National Inpatient Sample and found that the rate of HDP, which includes chronic or pregnancy-induced hypertension, increased from 13.3% to 15.9% during this period. Hypertensive disorders in pregnancy can cause severe complications, such as myocardial infarction or stroke. According to the data, almost a third of maternal deaths during delivery hospitalization occurred among women with HDP. Women who experience HDP also face a higher risk of [cardiovascular disease](#) long-term.

Older mothers had the highest risk. Nearly 1 in 5 mothers aged 35 to 44 years and nearly 1 in 3 mothers aged 45 to 55 years experienced an HDP. The authors also documented stark racial and ethnic disparities, with about 1 in 5 Black mothers and 1 in 6 American Indian and Alaska Native mothers having an HDP. People in the Midwest, South, or lower-income communities were also disproportionately affected.

According to a CDC [statement](#), reduced access or quality of care and a higher prevalence of hypertension risk factors such as metabolic diseases may contribute to these disparities. The CDC also emphasized that racial bias in US health care may affect screening, diagnosis, and care and that the psychosocial stress of experiencing racism is associated with chronic hypertension.

The report's authors recommended systemic implementation of quality improvement efforts to address maternal hypertension care and increased awareness of urgent maternal warning signs.

## Gabapentin Increasingly Implicated in Overdose Deaths

Postmortem toxicology tests detected gabapentin in almost 1 in 10 US overdose deaths between 2019 and 2020. In about half of the cases, a medical examiner or coroner ruled the drug was a cause of the death, according to a [report](#) from the CDC's Division of Overdose Prevention.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [approved](#) gabapentin for treating seizures and pain associated with shingles. But growing off-label prescribing of gabapentin for nerve pain and other conditions con-



tributed to its prescription rate [doubling](#) from about 13 to 27 per 1000 insurance beneficiaries between 2009 and 2016. In fact, by 2019, gabapentin had become the [seventh most prescribed drug](#) in the US.

Gabapentin is sometimes used to amplify the effects of illicit opioids. In late 2019, the FDA [warned](#) that gabapentin might cause serious breathing difficulties when used with drugs that depress the central nervous system, such as opioids, antianxiety medications, and antidepressants.

Now, data from the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System from 23 states and the District of Columbia suggest that gabapentin's role in US overdose deaths may be growing. Overall, toxicology tests detected gabapentin in 5687 overdose deaths between 2019 and 2020—about 10% of all cases with test results available. Overdose deaths in which gabapentin was detected doubled from 449 in the first quarter of 2019 to 959 in the second quarter of 2020.

The proportion of these cases that medical examiners ruled were caused by the drug increased from 50% in early 2019 to 55% by late 2020. About 90% of these cases also involved opioids, primarily illicitly manufactured fentanyl. About 83% of deaths caused by gabapentin occurred among White adults aged 35 to 54 years.

"Persons who use illicit opioids with gabapentin should be educated about the increased risk for respiratory depression and death," the authors wrote. — **Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ**

**Note:** Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.

