

Selected Findings from the 2022 Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth

March 2024

Stillbirth is a devastating loss for families who experience it. In Ohio, hundreds of babies are stillborn each year. In 2022, 745 babies were lost to stillbirth in the state. In 2022, Ohio's stillbirth rate was 5.8 fetal deaths per 1,000 live births and fetal deaths. The Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Medicaid initiated the Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth (Ohio SOARS) survey to better understand why stillbirths happen, help determine who is at risk, and identify opportunities for improvement in bereavement care and services.

2022 Ohio SOARS Survey

- The survey collects self-reported information about maternal experiences before, during, and after pregnancy among Ohio mothers who recently experienced a stillbirth. Ohio SOARS is an annual survey, first administered in 2020. All Ohio mothers who experienced a stillbirth in 2022 were invited to participate 2 to 6 months after delivery. Overall, 175 mothers who experienced a stillbirth completed the 2022 survey. The overall weighted response rate was 25.9%.
- This document highlights key findings from the 2022 survey administration. Data are weighted for non-response so percentages can be generalized to the entire population of Ohio mothers who experienced a stillbirth in 2022.

2022 Ohio SOARS Population

- Twenty-four percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were older than 35. Overall, 64% identified as white and 28% identified as Black or African-American.
- Statewide, 41% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were covered by private insurance through their own or their partner's employer, healthcare exchange or through their parents, while 45% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had Medicaid coverage for their prenatal care.

Pre-Pregnancy Health

- In 2022, 64% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth did not have a chronic condition, while 36% had a chronic health condition prior to pregnancy such as asthma, high blood pressure, thyroid problems, Type 1 or 2 diabetes, or polycystic ovary syndrome.
- Statewide, 52% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had symptoms of either depression or anxiety before pregnancy. Twenty-seven percent experienced both.
- Overall, 70% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth in 2022 reported that they had been pregnant before; 53% had previously delivered a live birth and 45% percent of all mothers who experienced a stillbirth previously experienced a pregnancy loss.

Pregnancy Intention

- Statewide, 49% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth reported that they wanted to be pregnant at that time and 14% wanted to be pregnant sooner.



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Prenatal Care

- Eighty-six percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth received prenatal care in the first trimester; 82% received prenatal care as early as they wanted it.
- Most mothers who experienced a stillbirth saw an OB/GYN physician as their primary provider for their pregnancy (75%).
- Most mothers who experienced a stillbirth received a detailed ultrasound or anatomic scan (86%).
- The survey asked mothers who experienced a stillbirth which topics, out of 14 total, their provider asked about at prenatal visits. Statewide, providers were most likely to discuss prescription medications (90%), smoking (89%), alcohol consumption (85%), and over the counter (OTC) medications (84%).
- Of the topics asked about at prenatal visits, providers were least likely to discuss if mothers knew how to track their baby's movements (45%), sleeping positions (42%), weight gain (40%), and the risk of stillbirth (20%).
- Overall, 72% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth felt comfortable asking questions. Similarly, 72% felt comfortable accepting the options given by their provider.
- Seventy-six percent felt their cultural preferences were respected, while 72% felt their personal preferences were respected. Twenty-five percent felt pushed into accepting decisions by their provider.

Basic Needs and Employment

- Most mothers who experienced a stillbirth in Ohio had access to basic needs such as safe housing (99%), affordable, reliable transportation (97%), and stable and consistent housing (97%).
- Overall, 79% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were employed while pregnant. Of those who were employed, 55% had returned to work by the time they completed the survey; 42% did not plan to return to work as of 2 to 6 months after delivery.
- Statewide, 22% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program during their pregnancy.

Personal Stressors

- Mothers who experienced a stillbirth were asked whether they experienced a variety of personal stressors during the 12 months prior to delivery. The stressors most frequently reported were having someone close to them die (20%), moving (18%), followed by arguing with their partner more often (17%). Twenty-one percent reported they experienced three or more stressors.
- In 2022, 15% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had a close family member who required hospitalization in the year prior to delivery.



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Grief Support

- Statewide, 42% of Ohio mothers who experienced a stillbirth received grief counseling.
- Among mothers who experienced a stillbirth who did not receive support or grief counseling, the most common reasons given were that they did not know where to go (42%), and they did not feel it was needed (36%).

COVID-19

- When asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during their most recent pregnancy, 30% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had more difficulty paying for bills and expenses than usual.
- Twenty-six percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth delayed getting medical care for themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Twenty percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth also experienced more anxiety or depression than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In-Hospital Gestures of Compassion and Support Following a Stillbirth

- The survey included a list of 14 gestures of compassion and support to identify those that were made available to mothers in Ohio who experienced a stillbirth. Statewide, the hospital services offered most frequently were: holding the baby (95%), funeral resources offered (94%), a baby photo (93%), hand/foot impressions (90%), having their baby stay in their room (88%), and baby mementos (87%).

(Continued) In-Hospital Gestures of Compassion and Support Following a Stillbirth

- Overall, 57% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were given information about what to do when their breast milk came in.
- Most mothers who experienced a stillbirth reported receiving adequate support in the grieving process from their provider (77%) and counseling staff (72%), but the highest proportion received adequate support from the nursing staff (81%).
- Most mothers who experienced stillbirth reported that they were allowed to ask questions following their stillbirth (84%) and that they received bereavement packets in the hospital (94%).
- Statewide, 73% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth said that their provider explained what may have happened; 60% indicated that they learned the cause of death.



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In-Hospital Areas of Need for Gestures of Compassion and Support Following a Stillbirth

There were several services that mothers who experienced a stillbirth said would have been helpful, but were not offered as frequently by hospitals. Areas where there were gaps in what was offered versus what would have been helpful include: baby and family photo, bathing baby, dressing baby, visit with a social worker, baptism or blessing of the baby and the use of a cooling bed, a crib-like device that extends the time families can spend with their baby. The areas with the largest gaps are shown in the figure below.

Areas of Need for Gestures of Compassion and Support in the Hospital Following a Stillbirth

