

Selected Findings from the 2023 Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth (Ohio SOARS)

April 2025

Stillbirth is a devastating loss for families who experience it. In 2023, Ohio lost 775 babies to stillbirth and the stillbirth rate was 6.1 fetal deaths per 1,000 live births and fetal deaths. The Ohio Department of Children and Youth 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.

2023 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 2023 were invited to participate 2 to 6 months after delivery. Overall, 160 mothers who experienced a stillbirth completed the 2023 survey.
- This document highlights key findings from the 2023 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 2023.

2023 Ohio SOARS Population

- Fifteen percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were older than 35. Overall, 57% identified as white and 29% identified as Black or African-American.
- Statewide, 41% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were covered by private insurance, while 48% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had Medicaid coverage for their prenatal care.

Pregnancy Health

- In 2023, 65% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth did not have a chronic condition, while 35% 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, 49% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had symptoms of either depression or anxiety before pregnancy. Twenty-eight percent experienced both.
- Overall, 67% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth in 2023 reported that they had been pregnant before; 79% had previously delivered a live birth, and 52% percent of all mothers who experienced a stillbirth previously experienced a pregnancy loss.

Pregnancy Intention

- Statewide, 57% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth reported that they wanted to be pregnant at that time, and 11% wanted to be pregnant sooner.



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Prenatal Care

- Eighty-eight percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth received prenatal care in the first trimester; 83% 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 (77%).
- Most mothers who experienced a stillbirth received a detailed ultrasound or anatomic scan (85%).
- 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 smoking (94%), prescription medications (93%), alcohol consumption (89%), and over-the-counter medications (84%).
- Of the topics asked about at prenatal visits, providers were least likely to discuss birth control use after pregnancy (53%), sleeping positions (48%), if mothers knew how to track their baby's movements (46%), and the risk of stillbirth (25%).
- Overall, 73% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth felt comfortable asking questions. Similarly, 70% felt comfortable accepting the options given by their provider.
- Statewide, 75% felt their personal preferences were respected. Twenty 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 (100%), access to a telephone when needed (99%), and affordable, reliable transportation (98%).
- However, 9% of mothers skipped meals or ate less because there was not enough money to buy food and 22% of mothers had at least one unmet need.
- Overall, 73% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were employed while pregnant. Of those who were employed, 72% had returned to work by the time they completed the survey; 25% did not plan to return to work as of 2 to 6 months after delivery.
- Statewide, 20% 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 who was very sick or died (13%) and having either their spouse, partner or self lose a job (13%).
- In 2023, 39% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had at least one personal stressor while 15% experienced three or more stressors.



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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 (98%), hand/foot impressions (96%), funeral resources offered (96%), a baby photo (93%), baby mementos (93%), and room-in with their baby (90%).
- Overall, 61% 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 (83%) and counseling staff (77%), but the highest proportion received adequate support from the nursing staff (94%).
- Most mothers who experienced stillbirth reported that they were allowed to ask questions following their stillbirth (95%) and that they received bereavement packets in the hospital (94%).
- Statewide, 82% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had a provider explain what may have happened; 64% indicated that they learned the cause of death.

Autopsy

- Twenty-two percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had a partial or full autopsy performed on their baby.

Autopsy (continued)

- Sixteen percent of mothers who did not have an autopsy performed were not offered the service, and 19% were told that the procedure would not provide answers regarding the cause of death.
- Among mothers who did not have an autopsy performed on their baby (78%), 29% declined for personal or religious reasons, and 25% declined the procedure because the cause of death was known.

Postpartum Care

- In Ohio, 93% of mothers had a postpartum checkup for themselves following a stillbirth.
- Among mothers who received a postpartum checkup, 93% were asked by their healthcare provider whether they were feeling down or depressed, and 83% discussed birth control methods to use after giving birth.
- Most mothers felt that their healthcare providers treated them with respect since they delivered their baby (85%); however, only 68% of mothers were satisfied with the postpartum support they have received, and 67% were able to choose the care options they received.

Grief Support

- Statewide, 54% 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 feel it was needed (52%), and they did not know where to go (31%).



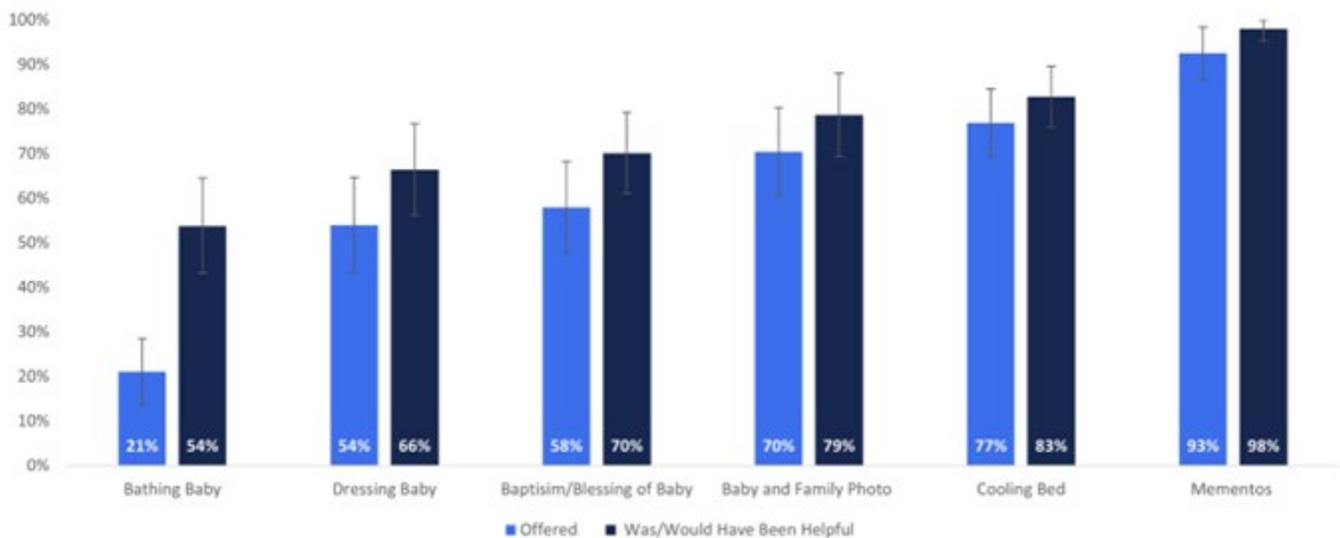
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In-Hospital Areas of Need for Gestures of Compassion and Support Following a Stillbirth

Mothers who experienced stillbirth stated that certain services would have been helpful, but were not always offered. These included bathing baby, dressing baby, baptism or blessing of the baby, baby and family photo, the use of a cooling bed (a crib-like device that extends the time families can spend with their baby), and mementos. 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



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