

Stillbirth is a devastating loss for families who experience it. In Ohio, hundreds of babies are stillborn each year. In 2020, 750 babies were lost to stillbirth in the state. Ohio's stillbirth rate averaged 6.4 fetal deaths per 1,000 live births from 2010 to 2019. The Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Medicaid initiated The Ohio Study of Associated Risks of Stillbirth (Ohio SOARS) survey. Ohio SOARS aims to better understand why stillbirths happen, help determine who is at risk, and identify opportunities for improvement in bereavement care and services.

2020 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 women who experienced a stillbirth in 2020 were invited to participate 2 to 6 months after delivery. Overall, 179 women completed the survey.
- This document highlights key findings from the 2020 survey administration. Data are weighted for non-response so percentages can be generalized to the entire population of Ohio mothers who lost a baby to stillbirth in 2020.

2020 Ohio SOARS Population

- Twenty-five percent of women who experienced a stillbirth were older than 35. Overall, 61% identified as White, 32% identified as Black or African-American.
- Statewide, 35% of mothers who lost a baby to stillbirth reported having Medicaid coverage for their prenatal care, while 52% were covered by private insurance through their own or their partner's employer, or through their parents.

Pre-Pregnancy Health

- In 2020, 42% of women who experienced a stillbirth reported having 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, half of women experienced either depression or anxiety before pregnancy (50%). Twenty-seven percent experienced both.
- Overall, 63% of women who experienced a stillbirth in 2020 reported that they had been pregnant before; 49% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had previously delivered a live birth. Approximately one-third of all women who experienced a stillbirth previously experienced a pregnancy loss.

Pregnancy Intention

- Statewide, 63% of women who experienced a stillbirth reported that they wanted to be pregnant at that time or sooner, 14% indicated that they wished they had been pregnant sooner, while 13% wanted to be pregnant later.

Prenatal Care

- Most mothers saw an OB/GYN physician as their primary provider for their pregnancy (84%).
- Most women received a detailed ultrasound or anatomic scan (76%).
- The survey asked mothers who experienced a stillbirth which topics, out of 10 total, their provider asked about at prenatal visits. Statewide, providers were most likely to discuss alcohol-consumption (93%), prescription medications (93%), and smoking (92%).
- Providers were least likely to discuss the risk of stillbirth (19%), sleep positions (38%), or weight gain (46%). Forty-eight percent of mothers were asked by their provider if they knew how to track their baby's movements.
- Overall, 84% of mothers felt comfortable asking questions and accepting the options given by their provider. Seventy-seven percent felt their personal preferences were respected, while 82% felt their cultural preferences were respected. Twenty-one 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 affordable, reliable transportation (93%), safe housing (97%), and stable and consistent housing (96%).
- However, 23% had at least one basic need that was not met. Basic needs included: transportation, housing, food security, utilities, telephone access, and other needs.
- Overall, 69% were employed while pregnant. Of those who were employed, 68% had returned to work by the time they completed the survey; 26% did not plan to return to work as of 2 to 6 months after delivery.
- Statewide, 28% of mothers participated in the Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program during their pregnancy.

Personal Stressors

- Participants were asked whether they experienced a variety of personal stressors during the 12 months prior to delivery. The stressors that women who experienced a stillbirth in Ohio most frequently reported were moving (30%), followed by arguing with their partner more often (25%), and having hours or their pay cut at work (23%).
- In 2020, 22% of women who experienced a stillbirth had a close family member who required hospitalization in the year prior to delivery. For 20%, someone close to them died.

Grief Support

- Statewide, 49% of Ohio mothers who experienced a stillbirth received grief counseling.
- Among those who did not receive support or grief counseling, the most common reasons were that they did not feel it was needed (50%), they did not know where to go (34%), or they were unaware of support groups nearby (31%).

COVID-19

- When asked about their most recent pregnancy, 50% of mothers who lost a baby to stillbirth experienced more anxiety or depression than usual due to COVID-19. Forty-one percent had more difficulty paying bills; 19% had more difficulty getting healthcare for themselves.

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 women in Ohio who experienced a stillbirth.
- Statewide, the hospital services offered most frequently were: holding the baby (97%), funeral resources (94%), hand/foot impressions (92%), baby mementos (92%), and a baby photo (90%). Ohio women who experienced a stillbirth also identified these items as the most helpful or potentially helpful.
- Overall, 63% of mothers were given information about what to do when their breast milk came in.
- Most mothers reported receiving adequate support in the grieving process from their provider (78%) and counseling staff (79%), but the highest proportion received adequate support from the nursing staff (93%).
- Most mothers reported that they were allowed to ask questions following their stillbirth (93%) and that they received bereavement packets in the hospital (90%).
- Statewide, 75% of mothers said that their provider explained what may have happened; 65% indicated that they learned the cause of death.

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

- There were several services that mothers said would have been helpful, but were not offered as frequently by hospitals. Seventy-two percent of Ohio mothers who experienced a stillbirth said a cooling bed - a crib-like device that extends the time families can spend with their baby - was/would have been helpful, but only 54% were offered this service. Forty-eight percent either had or would have wanted to have the opportunity to bathe their baby, but this was only offered to 29% of mothers. Seventy-six percent indicated that a baby and family photo either was or would have been helpful, compared to 60% who were offered this service. 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

