

Stillbirth is a devastating loss for families who experience it. In Ohio, hundreds of babies are stillborn each year. In 2021, 761 babies were lost to stillbirth in the state. Ohio's stillbirth rate averaged 6.2 fetal deaths per 1,000 live births plus fetal deaths from 2011 to 2021. 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.

## 2021 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 2021 were invited to participate 2 to 6 months after delivery. Overall, 154 mothers who experienced a stillbirth completed the 2021 survey.
- This document highlights key findings from the 2021 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 2021.

## 2021 Ohio SOARS Population

- Fifteen percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were older than 35. Overall, 64% identified as White, 29% identified as Black or African-American. Twenty-five percent reported a yearly household income of \$16,000 or less.
- Statewide, 50% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were covered by private insurance through their own or their partner's employer, or through their parents, while 39% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had Medicaid coverage for their prenatal care.

## Pre-Pregnancy Health

- In 2021, 67% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth did not have a chronic condition, while 33% 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, 47% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had symptoms of either depression or anxiety before pregnancy. Twenty-seven percent experienced both.
- Overall, 58% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth in 2021 reported that they had been pregnant before; 47% had previously delivered a live birth. Thirty percent of all mothers who experienced a stillbirth previously experienced a pregnancy loss.

## Pregnancy Intention

- Statewide, 66% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth reported that they wanted to be pregnant at that time or sooner, 13% indicated that they wished they had been pregnant sooner, while 6% wanted to be pregnant later.

## Prenatal Care

- Eighty-four percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth received prenatal care in the first trimester; 81% 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 10 total, their provider asked about at prenatal visits. Statewide, providers were most likely to discuss prescription medications (94%), over the counter (OTC) medications (93%), alcohol consumption (91%), and smoking (91%).
- Of the topics asked about at prenatal visits, providers were least likely to discuss the risk of stillbirth (20%), sleep positions (35%), if they knew how to track their baby's movements (41%), and weight gain (52%) with mothers who experienced a stillbirth.
- Overall, 74% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth felt comfortable asking questions and 76% felt comfortable accepting the options given by their provider. Sixty-six percent felt their personal preferences were respected, while 74% felt their cultural 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 affordable, reliable transportation (96%), safe housing (98%), and stable and consistent housing (96%). However, 15% had at least one basic need that was not met. Basic needs included: transportation, housing, food security, utilities, telephone access, and other needs.
- Overall, 73% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth were employed while pregnant. Of those who were employed, 73% had returned to work by the time they completed the survey; 24% did not plan to return to work as of 2 to 6 months after delivery.
- Statewide, 21% 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 moving (29%), followed by arguing with their partner more often (27%). Twenty-five percent reported they experienced three or more stressors.
- In 2021, 19% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had a close family member who required hospitalization in the year prior to delivery. For 16%, someone close to them died.
- Thirteen percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth reported at least one instance of discrimination during pregnancy.

## Grief Support

- Statewide, 49% 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 (5%), and they did not know where to go (25%).

## COVID-19

- When asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during their most recent pregnancy, 24% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had more difficulty paying for bills and expenses than usual.
- Nineteen percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth also experienced more anxiety or depression than usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Eighteen percent of mothers who experienced a stillbirth had more difficulty getting healthcare for themselves during 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 (97%), hand/foot impressions (97%), funeral resources offered (94%), a baby photo (90%), room-in with their baby (89%), and baby mementos (89%). Ohio mothers who experienced a stillbirth also identified several of these items as the most helpful or potentially helpful.
- Overall, 56% 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 (76%) and counseling staff (70%), but the highest proportion received adequate support from the nursing staff (88%).
- Most mothers who experienced stillbirth reported that they were allowed to ask questions following their stillbirth (93%) and that they received bereavement packets in the hospital (90%).
- Statewide, 66% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth said that their provider explained what may have happened; 59% 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 who experienced a stillbirth said would have been helpful, but were not offered as frequently by hospitals. Sixty-seven percent of Ohio mothers who experienced a stillbirth said dressing their baby was or would have been helpful, but only 35% were offered this service. Eighty-four percent indicated that a baby and family photo either was or would have been helpful, compared to 53% who 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 21% of mothers who experienced a stillbirth. Sixty-six percent said a cooling bed, a crib-like device that extends the time families can spend with their baby, was or would have been helpful, but only 55% 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**

