

Mo the Midwife®

PATIENT EDUCATION

COMMON CAUSES OF MATERNAL MORBIDITY & MORTALITY

Key pregnancy-related conditions that can lead to serious complications (morbidity) or death (mortality) within 42 days after pregnancy.

MATERNAL MORBIDITY

Serious, often life-threatening complications during pregnancy, childbirth, or up to 42 days postpartum that can cause short- or long-term health problems.

MATERNAL MORTALITY

Death from a pregnancy-related cause during pregnancy, childbirth, or within 42 days after the end of pregnancy (standard maternal mortality definition).

THE MOST COMMON CAUSES

Hemorrhage (Severe Bleeding)	The leading cause of maternal death. Can occur during pregnancy, delivery, or after birth (postpartum hemorrhage).
Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy (Preeclampsia/Eclampsia, HELLP)	High blood pressure during pregnancy that can cause seizures, stroke, organ damage, and death.
Infection (Sepsis)	A serious infection during pregnancy, childbirth, or after birth that can quickly become life-threatening.
Cardiovascular Conditions	Heart conditions (such as cardiomyopathy, heart failure, or blood clots in the lungs) that can worsen during pregnancy and after delivery.
Mental Health Conditions (including substance use)	Severe depression, anxiety, or a perinatal mood disorder (such as postpartum depression or psychosis), which can increase the risk of death, including suicide.

OTHER SERIOUS COMPLICATIONS (MORBIDITY) MAY INCLUDE:

- **Blood clots** (Deep Vein Thrombosis or Pulmonary Embolism)
- **Organ dysfunction** (kidney, liver, or lung problems)
- **Severe heart or breathing problems**
- **Stroke**
- **Complications from existing medical conditions** (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, sickle cell disease)

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

- **Severe headache** that won't go away
- **Changes in vision** (blurred vision, seeing spots)
- **Trouble breathing or chest pain**
- **Heavy bleeding** (soaking a pad in 1 hour or less)
- **Feeling very sad, anxious, or not like yourself**

Seek immediate medical attention for any warning signs or if something just doesn't feel right.

Source:

- CDC. Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System (PMSS): Trends in Maternal Mortality, 2005–2024 (2026).
- CDC. Severe Maternal Morbidity (SMM) in the United States (2024).