

## **Black Maternal Health Week: Reproductive Justice in America - The Time is Now**

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This is unacceptable. Black babies and Black women are dying. The disparity between Black and white pregnancy and birth complications is only rising. The gap is widening. The United States of America has a maternal-child mortality problem. It happens to be plaguing one group of Americans at all-time highs. Black Women and Children. They are dying at rates that would send the nation into an outright frenzy - if their skin were a different color. The awareness activities surrounding Black Maternal Health Week serve to amplify voices of Black mothers. Black women must be centered in the fight to end this disparity. Reproductive and birth justice are human rights. These rights are stripped away one by one by our current (outdated) Medical system. The medicalization of birth would take days to explain and unpack. In short, pregnancy is not a disease that must be treated. It is a natural bodily process. As Black Mamas Matter, the organization which coined Black Maternal Health Week would say, it is time to “trust Black women.”

- Across the country Black women are 2 to 3 times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women. (Source: CDC )
- In New York City the most populous city in the country Black (non-Hispanic) mothers are 12 times more likely to die from pregnancy related causes than their white (non-Hispanic) counterparts. (Source: NYC.Gov )
- The pregnancy related mortality rate for black women with a college degree or higher is 5 times that of white women with similar education. (Source: CDC )

This is not an issue of class, socioeconomic status, attending all of the prenatal health appointments, sanitation or even culture. Whenever there is a disparity the root cause tends to be systemic. Access to quality health care is a contributing factor however, the effects of systemic racism on Black mothers in the birthing process tend to yield particularly poor results. So how do we change this? What is the answer?

Birth Justice and evidence based birth can get us closer to the answer!

I cannot continue to write this piece and not acknowledge the world we are all currently living has changed and is changing each second of the day. In an abundance of caution hospital policies have changed overnight in response to COVID-19. Mothers have been forced to choose between their partners and their Doulas. A birth doula is a companion who supports a birthing person during labor and birth. Birth doulas are trained to provide continuous, one-on-one care, as well as information, physical support, and emotional support to birthing persons and their partners. Doulas are even more essential than before COVID-19 entered our collective reality. Continuous labor support contributes to better maternal-child outcomes. (Source: PubMed ) Black mothers and all mothers deserve someone to lean on, someone you can continuously rely on as a voice of support. This is true physically too. Doulas provide a great deal of physical comfort for the birthing person. No one should be forced to birth alone. COVID-19 is changing the face of birth and birthing. Home births are starting to seem like the best course of action for some birthing people. Virtual Doula support seems more like a necessity to ease the worries of new mamas.

For Black Maternal Health Week 2020 there are three things you can do to show your support and educate yourself. Follow CDC guidelines if you are pregnant or share them with an expecting mama. Practice Social Distancing as much as you possibly can. And share and repost articles like this using the hashtags #BMHW20 and #BlackMaternalHealthWeek to help spread awareness of this crisis. Please follow *Black Mothers in Power* for updates on the fight for reproductive health and birth for Black Mamas and babies in the state of Delaware.

Contact:

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Sources:

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