Protecting the Lives of Pregnant Women

The United States is the only industrialized nation in which the rate of mothers dying during pregnancy or childbirth is steadily rising.

Out of every 100,000 live U.S. births reported in 2015, the latest year examined, 26.4 resulted in the death of the mother, a 9 percent increase since 2000. In comparison, the United Kingdom’s maternal mortality rate in 2015 was 9.2 per 100,000 live births. Finland had the lowest rate at 3.8.

Non-Hispanic black women are three-to-four times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than non-Hispanic white women.

“These disturbing statistics point to a serious problem confronting our country,” said Dr. Carolyn M. Mazure, Director of Women’s Health Research at Yale. “As we observe National Minority Health Month this April, we must recognize that women, particularly black women, do not have the health care they need, and our research must focus on this need.”

Possible reasons for the rise in maternal mortality in the United States include women waiting until they are older to have children and a rise in health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, that make women more vulnerable to pregnancy complications.

Yet, a 2018 report from nine committees working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 70 percent of pregnancy-related deaths from bleeding and 68 percent of pregnancy-related deaths from cardiovascular and coronary conditions are preventable.

“For 20 years, Women’s Health Research at Yale has broadened the scope of what it means to advance the health of women — including conditions as diverse as cardiovascular disease and cancers,” Mazure said. “But we still prioritize reproductive health and are working to eliminate the unnecessary risk too many women face during and after pregnancy.”