

Hypertension in pregnancy is getting more common for Gen Z women

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Gen Zers and millennials are about twice as likely to develop high blood

pressure during pregnancy than women from the baby boom generation were, a new study finds. This includes conditions such as preeclampsia and gestational hypertension.

It's usually believed that the odds of developing high blood pressure during [pregnancy](#) rise with the age of the mother, but after taking age into account, [researchers discovered](#) that women born in and after 1981 were still at greater risk.

"While there are many reasons for the generational changes observed, we hypothesize that this is, in large part, due to the observed [generational decline in heart health](#)," said study co-author Dr. Sadiya Khan, an assistant professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. "We are seeing more people in more recent generations entering pregnancy with [risk factors](#) such as obesity."

She emphasized that [the stakes are high](#).

"[High blood pressure during pregnancy](#) is a leading cause of death for both mom and baby," Khan said in a school news release. "High blood pressure during pregnancy is associated with increased risk of heart failure and stroke in the mother and increased risk of the baby being born prematurely, being growth restricted or dying."

The researchers drew numbers from the National Vital Statistics System Natality Database. The study, which included data from more than 38 million women, focused on first pregnancies that occurred between 1995 and 2019.

These numbers allowed them to match [high blood pressure](#)-related disorders during pregnancy with mothers' birth year and race or ethnicity.

They found that the highest rates were among American Indian, Alaskan Native and Black women.

"This is the first multi-generational study that moves beyond the age of the mom or the calendar year of the delivery to understand patterns of hypertension in pregnancy," Khan said.

"This is especially important when we look at the legacy of substantial racial and ethnic disparities in this high-risk condition that affects not only the mom but also the baby," she said. "This sets up a vicious cycle of generational health decline by starting life with poorer [heart health](#)."

Co-author Dr. Natalie Cameron, an instructor of medicine at Northwestern, said the findings call for a new approach to screening.

"The [public health](#) and clinical message from this work is the need to broaden our perspective on screening and expand our focus on prevention in all age groups before and during pregnancy, particularly among [younger people](#) who have traditionally not been considered at high risk," Cameron said in the release.

Khan agreed. "Prevention and earlier identification can be lifesaving and improve the health of future generations beginning at birth," she said.

The study was published online Aug. 24 in *JAMA Open Network*.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [high blood pressure during pregnancy](#).

Natalie A. Cameron et al, Association of Birth Year of Pregnant Individuals With Trends in Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy in the United States, 1995-2019, *JAMA Network Open* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.28093](#)

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