

## 20,000+ babies are lost to stillbirth every year, according to the CDC

- **The stillbirth of a baby is an inexplicable loss of life, and an incomprehensible tragedy for the family, community, and our nation.**
  - Stillbirth (also known as fetal mortality) is defined as the death of a baby at 20+ weeks of pregnancy.
  - According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the annual number of stillbirths far exceeds the top five leading causes of death among children aged 0-14 years combined, including unintentional injuries, congenital anomalies, pre-term birth, homicide, SIDS, and heart disease.
  - Based on CDC data, in 2022, we lost an average of **55 babies EVERY DAY**.
  - Research indicates that at least 25% of stillbirths are preventable. Thousands of lives could be saved annually.
- **No pregnancy is immune. Stillbirths occur to women of all races, ethnicities, income levels, education levels, and ages. This includes women with healthy, low-risk pregnancies.**
  - Rural Americans are at greater risk for poor outcomes. According to a 2024 March of Dimes report, over 35% of U.S. counties lack birthing facilities or obstetric clinicians, affecting over 2.3 million women of reproductive age.
  - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Black, and Indigenous families are at greater risk of losing a baby to stillbirth.
- **Stillbirth and maternal morbidity and mortality are linked.**
  - More than 15% of maternal deaths within 42 days of delivery occur in women who experienced a stillbirth.
  - Research shows that the risk of severe maternal morbidity is more than four times higher among stillbirth deliveries compared with live births.
- **Stillbirth has a profound and long-lasting impact on mental health.**
  - The impact on both maternal and paternal mental health, and shows elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD in families who have experienced loss.
  - Research also consistently shows that the emotional and psychological stress associated with stillbirth significantly increases the likelihood of relationship strain and marital breakdown.
- **Stillbirth is an economic burden to families, communities, and our nation.**
  - In the United States, the birth of a stillborn baby involves both significant direct costs (e.g., higher hospital and delivery expenses, burial and potential autopsy expenses), long-term healthcare costs (e.g., additional testing, subsequent high-risk pregnancy care and mental health services), and indirect costs (e.g., lost productivity and income).
- **The U.S. trails most developed countries in its progress to prevent stillbirth.**
  - In the last 2 decades, the stillbirth rate in the United States declined by a negligible 0.9 %. In a report published by UNICEF comparing progress in improving stillbirth rates, the United States ranked worse than 151 countries.

**Stillbirth has been ignored for too long. Barriers exist that perpetuate the stillbirth crisis in our nation.**

- **Proven challenges in data collection on stillbirth have led to dangerous data gaps that impede public health efforts to prevent stillbirths.**
  - As noted by the Working to Address the Tragedy of Stillbirth Stillbirth Working Group of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Council March 15, 2023, "*The current system for obtaining, updating, validating, analyzing, and releasing data on stillbirth in the United States needs substantial improvement.*"
  - Delayed data means delayed understanding and action on the issue.
- **A lack of research to find solutions leaves American families more vulnerable to stillbirth.**
  - Approximately one-third of stillbirths currently have no known cause. Without an understanding of why babies are dying, we will be unable to identify ways to prevent those deaths.
  - To date, a full research agenda, including studies on stillbirth risk factors and prevention methods, has not been developed and supported.
- **The U.S. stillbirth rate is a concerning indicator of the gap in quality healthcare around pregnancy and birth.**
  - Fractures in our hospital and public health systems, including barriers to accessing care, directly impact patient care and outcomes.
  - A proven health literacy gap for both expectant parents and providers persists around stillbirth.
    - Loss parents report they did not receive education on their risk factors for stillbirth or ways to prevent it. Many indicate the first time they heard the word stillbirth was when it happened to them.
    - To date there are no targeted national efforts to implement or expand proven evidence-based prevention programs related to stillbirth.
- **A lack of funds to implement evidence-based solutions remains a barrier.**
  - In the U.S., despite medical advances and *increased* spending on healthcare in comparison to other nations, our stillbirth rate has remained relatively stagnant.
    - Preventing stillbirth has the potential to save the government, insurance companies, healthcare systems, and tax payers money.
  - Preventable stillbirth is a solvable, bipartisan issue. However, the federal government to date has not taken any substantial action to prioritize stillbirth by adequately addressing known systems gaps.

## Together, we can make preventable stillbirth a maternal health tragedy of the past.

- Advocates from across the nation have raised much needed awareness and successfully garnered bipartisan support for stillbirth prevention.
- **Congress has designated Sept. 19 as National Stillbirth Prevention Day** by passage of a resolution for the past three years (2022, 2023 and 2024).
- **The Maternal and Child Health Stillbirth Prevention Act was signed into law on July 12, 2024.** This is the first piece of federal legislation to specifically address stillbirth.
  - The bill passed the U.S. House 408-3, and passed the Senate unanimously. It was enacted on July 12, 2024. (*Public Law No: 118-69*)
  - **What it does:** This law expands the scope of the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant to include research and activities to prevent stillbirths.
  - **Remaining Barrier:** Although the law provided needed clarity and a call to action to utilize existing funds, state health departments did not receive additional funding to help them properly address the breadth of the issue.
- **Stillbirth Health Improvement and Education (SHINE) for Autumn Act was introduced in the 118th Congress.** Despite strong bipartisan support (*41 U.S. Senators co-sponsored and 114 members of the House joined*) the bill fell short of time to pass in Congress.
  - The focus of this bill was to fund HHS grants to improve data collection, research, and prevention programming on stillbirth.

## There are proven solutions to save babies from preventable stillbirth.

- **By improving our system for collecting, updating, validating, and analyzing stillbirth data in the U.S. we can bridge the data gap.**
- **Targeted research efforts are needed to identify risk factors for stillbirth, which can be used for better prevention strategies in high-risk areas.**
- **The U.S. can learn from the successful efforts of other nations and implement proven strategies to prevent stillbirth.**
- **Empowering expectant parents by improving patient health literacy through evidence-based education is a vital strategy for saving lives.**
  - Successful campaigns like the CDC's HearHer campaign (maternal morbidity/mortality prevention), and Back to Sleep (reducing SIDS) campaign highlight the impact of health literacy on improving health outcomes.
  - Implementing evidence-based strategies across the nation, such as fetal movement monitoring with the proven *Count the Kicks* program, will save more lives.
    - Iowa (where *Count the Kicks* began) experienced a 32% stillbirth rate reduction in the first 10 years of the empowering educational campaign.
    - Why does fetal movement matter? It is the first and sometimes only warning sign a baby in utero may give when in distress. When an expectant parent is educated to be in tune with their baby's normal pattern and empowered to speak up to their healthcare provider with concerns, lives can be saved.