

Becoming a mom is an exciting and scary time, regardless of whether it’s the first or fifth time. The entire experience of pregnancy, giving birth, and the postpartum period is a critical time for a mother’s health. It is a window when new moms are not only recovering from childbirth and adjusting to life with a new baby, but also undergoing significant physical and psychological changes. Health issues can arise several months past giving birth and can have long-term implications, especially when they go untreated. In turn, this affects the health of the new baby.

In Idaho, we are unfortunately seeing concerning maternal health outcomes and trends that are worse than national averages.  According to the Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics Idaho 2020 Mortality Report, maternal mortality is rising rapidly.  In order to better understand what is happening locally, the Idaho Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) was established by the Idaho Legislature in 2019 to identify, review, and analyze maternal deaths in the state of Idaho.  The MMRC recently reported that the leading causes of maternal death were non-cardiovascular medical conditions, mental health conditions, infections, and injuries.  We know these conditions are treatable with timely access to proper care.

Mental health issues are particularly prevalent and acute among new moms. More than one in five Idaho mothers experience moderate to severe postpartum depression, and half of all low‑income mothers experience depression. Over half of these women with depression never receive treatment. Untreated depression during pregnancy increases the likelihood of preterm deliveries and low birth weight babies. These babies spend more time in the Intensive Care Unit, which can cost $10,000+ per week. . Treatment of postpartum depression sets mothers up to better bond with their babies and their babies are more likely to meet developmental milestones.

Many mothers are not receiving care when they need it. In 2020, almost 1 in 5 Idaho mothers did not receive any prenatal care in their first trimester of pregnancy and 1 in 3 did not have health coverage prior to pregnancy. Idaho also ranks last in the nation for health coverage assistance for women with low incomes

Pediatricians often tell families that they cannot care for a newborn baby if they do not take care of themselves. It is heartbreaking to watch mothers struggling with their own health, while juggling the demanding tasks of infant care.

We are asking Idaho lawmakers to support new mothers and their babies. Now is the time to take action to support the health and well-being of moms and their babies. Currently, postpartum health insurance coverage ends at 60 days. We support House Bill 122, which extends postpartum health insurance coverage to 12 months. This will help ensure that more at-risk moms and babies get a healthy start in life, and reverse Idaho’s course on troubling health trends.

Tyler Burpee, M.D., President   
Idaho Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

*Originally from Idaho, Dr. Tyler Burpee is a pediatric gastroenterologist. He serves as president of the Idaho Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The Idaho Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is committed to promotion of the health and welfare of Idaho’s children.*