

# Disparities in minoritised ethnic groups – Maternal health (pregnancy)

## Mini Needs Assessment

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## Overview

Addressing disparities in minoritised ethnic groups is a vital public health priority. During pregnancy women from minoritised ethnic backgrounds are more likely to face unequal health outcomes. Ethnicity based health inequalities can lead to differences in health status and access to services in multiple areas of maternity care. Public Health England produced a report in 2020 which found that “women from ethnic minority backgrounds experienced poorer outcomes in other aspects of pregnancy and childbirth including neonatal mortality rates, pre-term birth and perinatal mental health” (Patterson, 2021). Findings from the latest MBRRACE report in 2020 support this by highlighting the inequalities of outcomes for women from different racial groups (Disley, 2021). On average women from minoritised ethnic backgrounds are more likely to die during pregnancy or within the first year of their baby’s life in comparison to white women. Asian women twice as likely, mixed ethnicity women three times more likely and black women 4 times more likely (Disley, 2021).

## National Plans and Guidance

### **NHS Plan to Improve equity and equality in maternity and neonatal care**

The NHS have put together a plan which aims to make maternity care for all women equal and improve equity for mothers/ babies and staff. The guidance is in response to the findings from the MBRRACE paper mentioned previously in relation to maternal and perinatal mortality showing worse outcomes for ethnic minority women living in deprived areas. The guidance can be found here: [NHS England » Improving equity and equality in maternity and neonatal care](#)

### **Equity and equality guidance**

This guidance was published in September 2021 and provided a framework for local maternity services to improve maternal health outcomes with a focus on mothers and babies from black, Asian, mixed ethnicity groups and those living in the most deprived areas (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2023., p 17).

## **National research and evidence**

National research and evidence demonstrates:

- Socioeconomic inequalities account for pregnancy outcomes, including stillbirths, preterm births, and foetal growth restriction – with largest inequalities seen in South Asian and Black people living in most deprived areas ([London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2021](#))
- Black women are regularly underrepresented in research or data and therefore in policymaking ([House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2023.](#), p28)
- Black, Asian, and minoritised ethnic women have significantly higher morbidity and mortality rates in the UK as well as poorer experiences of care ([Khan, 2021](#))
- Communication, language barriers, misunderstanding information. Short appointment times, lack of translators disproportionately affect ethnic minority women during pregnancy
- The impact of the relationship between midwife and mum can affect satisfaction of care and pregnancy experience. This will likely be the case for the population locally also.
- Stereotyping and a lack of cultural awareness affect how satisfied ethnic minority women are with the care they receive
- Stillbirth rates by ethnicity decreased in all groups after a rise in 2021, but wide ethnic inequalities remain; babies of Black ethnicity are still more than twice as likely to be stillborn than babies of White ethnicity (Black: 6.19 per 1,000 total births; White: 2.99 per 1,000 total births) ([MBRRACE-UK, 2024](#))
- Neonatal mortality rates decreased for babies of Black and White ethnicity, with rates for babies of Black ethnicity decreasing after a two-year period of increase. However, neonatal mortality for babies of Asian ethnicity increased for the second year. Babies of both Asian and Black ethnicity continue to have much higher rates of neonatal mortality than babies of White ethnicity (Asian: 2.50 per 1,000 live births; Black: 2.41 per 1,000 live births; White: 1.56 per 1,000 live births) ([MBRRACE-UK, 2024](#))
- A press release on the government website in 2022 explored the latest UKHSA data on the COVID-19 vaccine uptake amongst pregnant women. It shows an upward trend in pregnant women having at least the first two doses of the vaccine however despite this increase women of black ethnicity and those living in the more deprived areas of the UK remain the least likely to be vaccinated ([UK Health Security Agency, 2022](#))
- Looking at trends for vaccine uptake during pregnancy (for various different vaccines) women of black ethnicity and those living in the most deprived areas of England remain the least likely to be vaccinated. An example is the prenatal pertussis vaccine “prenatal pertussis coverage (%) for 2023/24 was the highest in White British women (66.8%) and lowest in Black or Black British Caribbean women (29.9%)” ([UK Health Security Agency , 2024](#))

## **The local picture**

- In Hull from the most recent consensus in 2021 43,051 (16.1%) out of 267,100 people (Office for National Statistics , 2022) identified as lack, Asian or Minority Ethnic group (which includes white, but non-British, residents). This compares to 26.5% nationally and is an increase from 10.3% (26,486) in Hull in 2011 ([Hull Data Observatory , 2022](#))
- Hull has a relatively low percentage of deliveries to mothers from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups compared to England, but the percentage in Hull is considerably higher than some local authorities within the Humber area (East Riding of Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, and North East Lincolnshire) ([Hull's JSNA, 2022](#))
- The percentage of deliveries to mothers from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups has been gradually increasing in Hull from 8.2% for 2013/14 to 11.5% for 2020/21, but the increase in the last two years has been greater increasing to 18.5% for 2022/23. The difference between the percentage in Hull compared to England has decreased over this time period ([Hull's JSNA, 2022](#))

## **Key themes: Areas for focus to improve health outcomes for minoritised ethnic mums and patient satisfaction.**

The following were key themes picked out by a systematic review into Health inequalities experienced by minoritised ethnic women in maternity services to improve health outcomes for mums and patient satisfaction (Khan , 2021):

- 1. Communication:** Use of medical terminology, poor active listening skills by health professionals resulted in women feeling dismissed and unsafe as well alternatively a positive impact of active listening, or otherwise known as non-directive listening, meant that women were able to talk openly about concerns including any emotional distress.
- 2. Midwife- women relationship:** Importance of building a rapport between mum and midwife encourages open conversations.
- 3. Maternity services and systems:** In a study mentioned in this report “midwives recognised that short appointment times created barriers for women due to time pressures and lack of flexibility from interpreting services” one woman interviewed “felt that the lack of an interpreter resulted in postponement or delay in appointments which they perceived to affect the quality of their antenatal care (Khan, 2021).
- 4. Culture:** “Disregard for women's cultural or religious needs resulted in a lack of individualised care that was neither sensitive nor responsive” (Khan, 2021)
- 5. Social needs:** The (Goodwin et al., 2017) study found that “women living in deprivation with social and financial difficulties found it difficult to access services”. In addition some women receive limited support from local communities or family which can affect their expectations of the support they were to receive from health services.

## **Priorities for improving outcomes for ethnic minority women during pregnancy: Areas to look at in Hull**

Based on national research, the following are priority areas for Hul:

- Continuity of care throughout pregnancy with the same midwife- this is included in the [Improving equity and equality in maternity and neonatal care NHS England](#) document.
- Increase vaccination and screening uptake amongst Black and Black Caribbean women.
- Focus on engaging minoritised ethnic women in services. Research states that lower engagement can be down to differences in the UK maternity services compare to a woman's native country (Khan , 2021).

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