

- Virus

Risk for pregnancy complications higher during COVID-19 pandemic

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A pregnant person's risk for complications, such as gestational diabetes, gestational high blood pressure, poor fetal growth and preeclampsia, increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, a study published Friday by JAMA Network Open found.

Compared with 2019, the year before the coronavirus emerged and spread globally, people were 12 percent more likely to develop diabetes during pregnancy and 7 percent more likely to develop high blood pressure during pregnancy in 2020, the height of the pandemic, the data showed.

Similarly, they had a 7 percent higher risk for poor fetal growth — or low-birth-weight babies — and 4 percent higher risk for preeclampsia, a condition that causes high blood pressure and liver or kidney problems, the researchers said.

However, rates of stillbirth and preterm delivery were about the same in 2020 as they had been before the pandemic, according to the researchers.

“Our finding that the pandemic period was not associated with a changing risk of stillbirth and provided only modest evidence of a lower risk of preterm birth is broadly consistent with the existing literature,” the researchers wrote.

“Our study provides novel evidence of the association of the pandemic with the risk of complications that have rarely been documented,” they said.

The study, conducted by researchers at Boston University School of Public Health and Brown University School of Public Health, is the latest to document pregnancy complications related to the pandemic.

Pregnant people suffering from COVID-19 with symptoms are more likely to experience complications that call for an emergency delivery, according to a study presented earlier this month during the annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

In addition, a study published in August by JAMA Network Open found that pregnant people with COVID-19 are about 40 percent more likely to deliver their babies prematurely and have a five-fold higher risk for intensive care treatment during childbirth.

This study also found that pregnant women with the virus have a roughly 15-fold higher risk for dying while in the hospital, though this remains rare.