

Maternal Mental Health

Virginia — PRAMS, 2023

Background

Maternal Mental Health describes the emotional well-being of a woman during a pregnancy and the postpartum period afterwards. Feelings of depression is one component of Maternal Mental Health. Depression is a serious mood disorder that may last for weeks or months at a time, and postpartum depression is depression that occurs after having a baby. Many women experience “baby blues” described as worry, sadness, and tiredness after having a baby, but feelings of postpartum depression are more intense and last longer.¹ In the United States, mental health was the highest contributor of maternal mortality or pregnancy-associated deaths among Non-Hispanic White women, and the second among Hispanic women.² Data from Virginia PRAMS show a decline in screening for postpartum depression by 10% from 2021 to 2023.³ Improving maternal mental health which involves screening for, properly diagnosing, and safely treating depression, plays an important role in improving maternal and infant well-being in Virginia.

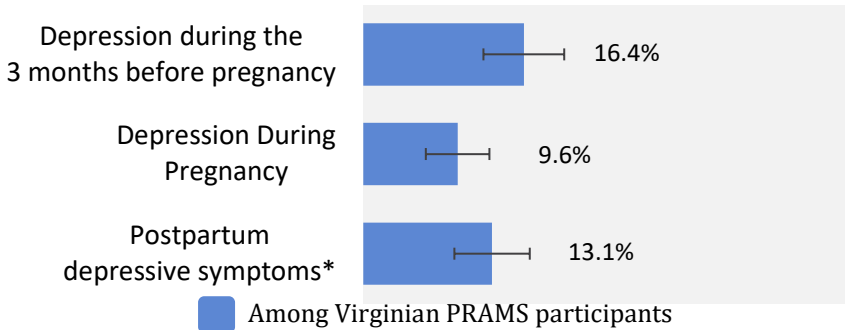
Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS)

PRAMS collects site-specific, population-based data on maternal attitudes and experiences before, during, and shortly after pregnancy. PRAMS surveys are typically completed 2 to 6 months after a live birth.

Maternal Mental Health National Goal

Healthy People 2030 Objective⁴	MICH-34 – (Developmental) Decrease the proportion of women delivering a live birth who experience postpartum depressive symptoms
--	--

Maternal Depression Before, During, and After Pregnancy



17.5% of Mothers had a health care visit in the 12 months before pregnancy for depression or anxiety

*Defined as “always” or “often” feeling down, depressed, or hopeless or having little interest or little pleasure in doing things she usually enjoyed since delivery
 Note: Bars display 95% Confidence Intervals

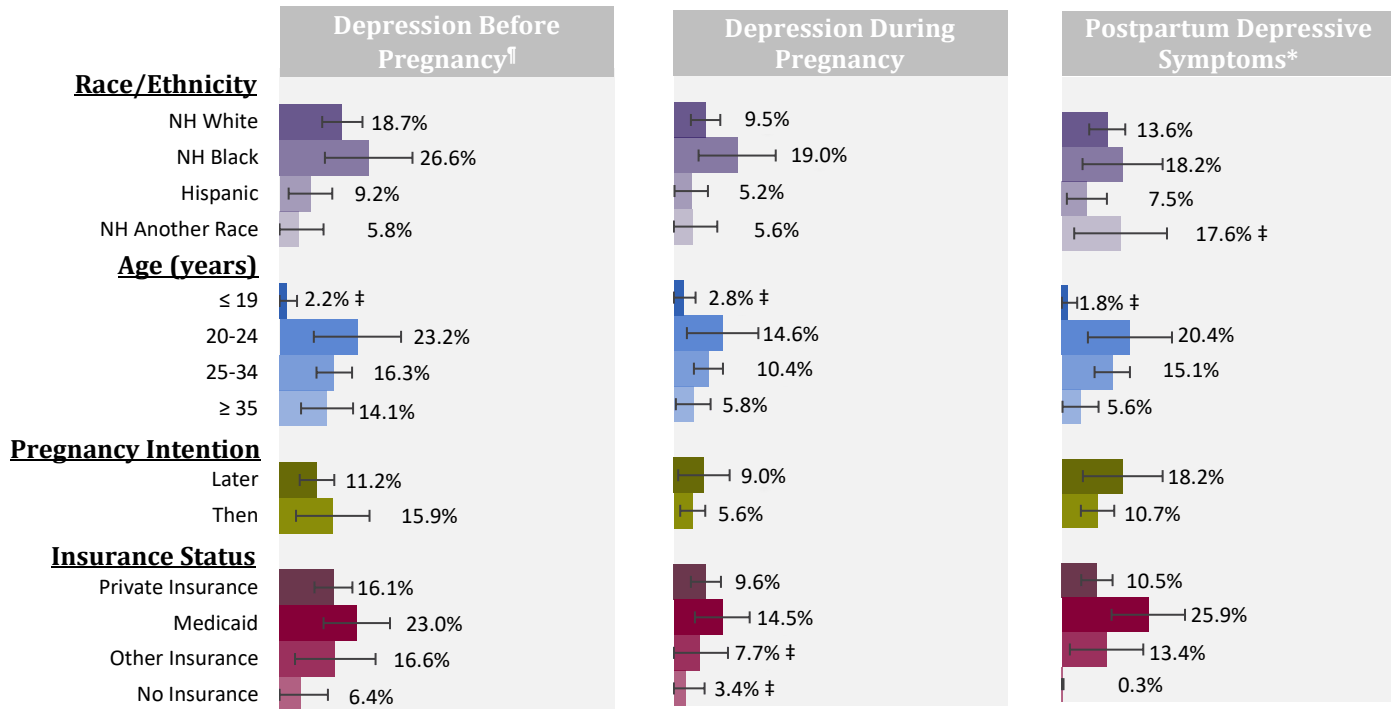
Screening for Mental Health Among Women Who Had Health Care Visits

PRAMS Indicator	Virginia 2021 % (95% Confidence Interval) [†]	Virginia 2023 % (95% Confidence Interval) [†]
Asked by a healthcare worker in the <u>12 months before pregnancy</u> if feeling down, depressed, anxious, or irritable	53.2 (46.6-59.8)	59.6 (53.6, 65.7)
Asked by a healthcare worker <u>during a prenatal care visit</u> if feeling down, depressed, anxious, or irritable	75.7 (71.0-80.3)	78.1 (73.4-82.8)
Asked by a healthcare worker <u>during the postpartum checkup</u> if feeling down, depressed, anxious or irritable	92.3 (89.9-95.3)	82.4 (78.0, 86.7)

[†] Weighted Percentage (95% Confidence Interval)

Virginia PRAMS: Maternal Mental Health

Women who reported depression before[†] or during pregnancy, or postpartum depressive symptoms*, by maternal characteristics — Virginia, 2023



Abbreviations: NH=non-Hispanic
 NH Another Race includes NH Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native, and other reported races
 *Defined as “always” or “often” feeling down, depressed, or hopeless or having little interest or little pleasure in doing things she usually enjoyed since delivery
[†] 3 months before pregnancy
 ‡ < 30 respondents; may not be reliable
 Note: Bars display 95% Confidence Intervals

Summary

Virginia’s pregnant and postpartum women need greater efforts in the pre-pregnancy years to address mental health. Maternal mental health is related to maternal deaths that are preventable. Screening for depression was a goal for Healthy People 2020, and these efforts must continue in order to meet the Healthy People 2030 goal of reducing postpartum depression.

- Overall, a majority of women were screened for depression before pregnancy (59.6%), during pregnancy (78.1%), and after pregnancy (82.4%).
- The rates of women who were screened for depression symptoms before pregnancy and during pregnancy increased from 2021 to 2023, but the reported rate of screening after pregnancy shows a decrease from 2021 to 2023.
- Improving family planning may also improve rates of postpartum depression among those who wanted to be pregnant later as these respondents experienced an increase in postpartum depression (18.2%) vs pre-pregnancy rates (11.2%)

Resources

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance: <https://www.mmhla.org/>

Postpartum Depression Facts: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/postpartum-depression-facts/index.shtml>

References:

1. Depression During and After Pregnancy: <https://www.cdc.gov/features/maternal-depression/index.html>
2. Eugene Declercq Laurie C. Zephyrin, *Maternal Mortality in the United States, 2025* (Commonwealth Fund, July 2025). <https://doi.org/10.26099/kdfd-fc19>
3. <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/67/2024/06/Maternal-Mental-Health-PRAMS-2021.pdf>
4. Healthy People 2030 Objectives: <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/pregnancy-and-childbirth>

To learn more about Virginia PRAMS methods and to see other data visit: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/prams/>

