



Quick Facts About Depression in Expectant and New Mothers

Pregnancy is one of the most profound joys in life a woman can experience. However, pregnancy can also cause major hormonal changes that trigger a wide range of symptoms of depression and anxiety during pregnancy and up to two years following a baby's birth.

The collective term for depression during pregnancy and after is perinatal depression. Nationally, some form of perinatal depression affects up to 1 in 7 women during pregnancy, according to the American Psychological Association, making it the leading complication of pregnancy. Beyond its effect on the mother, perinatal depression can also have a significant impact on a child's social, emotional and developmental health.

In Orange County, this rate translates to 10,200 women, as well as their children, who are impacted by perinatal depression each year.

Complicating matters, many expectant and new mothers who suffer symptoms of perinatal depression feel guilty for the emotions they're experiencing and blame themselves instead of seeking available effective treatment.

The national and local trends make clear the need for increased access to mental health screenings, prevention and care before, during and after pregnancy for expectant and new mothers.

Why You Should Care

- A new mother's emotional well-being profoundly impacts her ability to properly care for her newborn.
- Perinatal depression is a leading complication of pregnancy.
- Depression and anxiety can result in premature deliveries, lower birth weights, higher rates of C-section and higher levels of stress on newborns.
- Babies born to depressed mothers might experience changes to their neurochemistry, which may predispose them to depression later in life.
- Left untreated, depression and anxiety can have profound short- and long-term effects on newborns and the family unit, including less breastfeeding, decreased bonding with the mother and disrupted attachment, cognitive, emotional and developmental delays, and behavioral challenges. These increased stressors to the family may contribute to marital discord or divorce, abuse or neglect to the child, intimate partner violence, and substance abuse.

First 5 Orange County Position Statement

First 5 Orange County believes that addressing the mental health of expectant and new mothers is an essential part of prenatal medical care and a critical part of the full scope of services every mother and infant should have.

We are taking a leadership role to connect systems of care and streamline access to universal screenings, connections to support, prevention, early intervention, treatment, and community education.

Action Steps

Our action steps aim to increase perinatal and maternal mental health screening and facilitate access to services and treatment by:

- Focusing on system-level changes and improving the standard of care for all mothers.
- Expanding services through countywide programs, including increasing access to comprehensive health and psychosocial screenings, home visitation programs, and community-focused prevention, early identification and intervention programs.
- Providing more than 22,000 home visits annually to improve parent knowledge of mental health and healthy child development.