

Further analysis of the research indicates that Asian women are four times more likely than white women to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19 during pregnancy, while Black women are eight times more likely.

Today, England's most senior midwife, Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, has written to all maternity units in the country calling on them to take four specific actions which will minimise the additional risk of COVID-19 for BAME women and their babies.

The common sense steps include:

1. Increasing support of at-risk pregnant women – e.g. making sure clinicians have a lower threshold to review, admit and consider multidisciplinary escalation in women from a BAME background.
2. Reaching out and reassuring pregnant BAME women with tailored communications.
3. Ensuring hospitals discuss vitamins, supplements and nutrition in pregnancy (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/vitamins-minerals-supplements-pregnant>) with all women. Women low in vitamin D may be more vulnerable to coronavirus so women with darker skin or those who always cover their skin when outside may be at particular risk of vitamin D insufficiency and should consider taking a daily supplement of vitamin D all year.
4. Ensuring all providers record on maternity information systems the ethnicity of every woman, as well as other risk factors, such as living in a deprived area (postcode), co-morbidities, BMI and aged 35 years or over, to identify those most at risk of poor outcomes.

Chief Midwifery Officer for England, Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, said: “We know that pregnant women from a BAME background are twice as likely to be admitted to hospital with Covid-19 compared to white women, which is why we’re helping midwives take sensible extra steps to protect mum and baby. “While Public Health England is continuing to assess and advise on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on ethnic groups, I want to make sure that the NHS is doing everything we can to reach out, reassure and support those pregnant women and new mums most at risk.

The pandemic outbreak has caused some people to worry about seeking help from the NHS, and there has been a decrease in attendances for some NHS services.

Warning signs like unusual fetal movement have also been dismissed by some women in fear that going to hospital is of greater risk to them, with local services today asked to deliver outreach programmes for at-risk communities.