



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON
BRONX HEALTH MATTERS
 HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION NEWSLETTER

2022 Issue 1

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MATERNAL HEALTH CRISIS: PROTECTING OUR MOTHERS IN THE BRONX

Written by Orly Baras | Edited by Rubashruti Kanna

Mothers in the Bronx and Northern Brooklyn have a higher risk of dying from childbirth than mothers in any other borough. According to 2020 CDC data, Black women in NYC were three times more likely than white or Hispanic women to die from maternal causes. This crisis, medically known as “maternal mortality,” requires our community to take steps to ensure the well-being and safety of women undergoing childbirth.

Reproductive health care services are designed to improve maternal health through prevention, termination and management of detrimental pregnancies. These services include contraception, preconception care, maternity care, counseling, and abortion access.

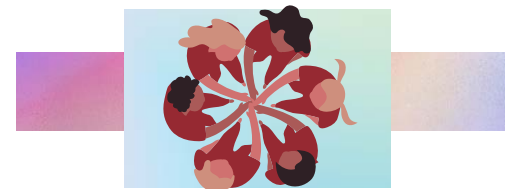


Access to abortion is a crucial component of reproductive healthcare and an essential right. Due to the recent overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court ruling which had protected abortion rights for the last fifty years, women across the United States are now struggling to access abortion and family planning services.

Without proper reproductive care, women are at a much higher risk for maternal mortality as well as mental and financial issues. Limiting legal abortion services also causes an increase in illegal abortions, which are unsafe and unapproved procedures that pose serious health risks.

Black women in NYC are 3x more likely to die from maternal causes.

Removing abortion access disproportionately affects women of color and low-income individuals who are less likely to be able to afford to travel out of their state to receive abortion access. In New York State, women can legally receive abortions up to and including 24 weeks of pregnancy, and can still access abortion services after 24 weeks if their health is at risk or in the case of fetal non-viability.



The Bronx Borough is strategically building upon this policy by enacting supportive legislation, hosting rallies, and holding press conferences to further defend and protect the rights of women.

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Working towards Solutions

The Office of the Bronx Borough President (BBP) is pursuing significant policy, legislative, and economic changes to improve maternal health, focusing its work on building core community resources: the Bronx Maternal Health Consortium, the Bronx Birthing Center, and The Bronx Health Link.

Bronx Maternal Health Consortium

In 2020, the BBP Office convened the Black Maternal Mortality Task Force, whose purpose was to reduce the incidence of death and injury of mothers before, during, or after birth. Task Force findings were published in a report in March 2021 detailing the disproportionate burden of maternal mortality among women of color in the Bronx and providing recommendations for next steps, including the need for a long-term Bronx-based coalition to combat this issue. From this task force emerged the Bronx Maternal Health Consortium (BMHC) in 2021, which is comprised of a diverse array of Bronx leaders and representatives, including health care providers, elected officials, and community leaders.



The goals of the BMHC are to establish a Bronx Maternal & Morbidity Review Committee for assessing annual progress, to procure additional surveillance for an annual Fetal & Infant Mortality Review, and to create strategies to increase funding for programming.

Bronx Birthing Center

The Borough President is also working to establish a Bronx Birthing Center, which would offer women support of birthing professionals at minimal or no cost, including access to doula and midwifery services.

Bronx Birth Justice Defender Hub

The BBP is committed to designating The Bronx Health Link as the Bronx Birth Justice Defender Hub. This would make it eligible for state and federal funding as the borough's designated referral hub for maternal health services. The BHL, located on the 9th floor of Borough Hall, currently engages in boroughwide maternal and infant health advocacy and offers free prenatal and postnatal educational workshops.

BBP Policy Advocacy

The BBP Office has also hosted conferences supporting maternal health. On June 30, 2022, Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson hosted a press conference denouncing the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Attendees included Planned Parenthood of Greater New York, Essen Health Care, Bronx Health Link, and other groups demonstrating their support.

.....
"Whether it's on the federal, state, or city level, the decision by the Justices begs us all to do our part to protect the rights of women not just here, but across this nation, as all too many are under scrutiny."
- Borough President Gibson
.....

Borough President Gibson also spoke about Introduction-506A, a bill she spearheaded to raise awareness about "Crisis Pregnancy Centers" that falsely pose as abortion clinics but in reality advise women against abortions. The bill was sponsored by New York City Council Member Carlina Rivera and was passed as part of the historic NYC Abortion Rights Act on July 14th, requiring the City to include information in public education programs about these deceptive clinics.

Recommendations

The Borough is dedicated to creating

The image shows the cover of a report titled "BLACK MATERNAL MORTALITY TASK FORCE REPORT". The cover features a blue background with a yellow silhouette of a pregnant woman. Text on the cover includes "THE OFFICE OF BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ, JR. MARCH 2021". Below the cover is a QR code with the text "SCAN ME" and the instruction "Scan the QR Code to read the report".

stronger local legislation to combat the racial disparities in maternal health and support women. The following are recommendations for continued action regarding the issue of maternal morbidity.

We strongly encourage **increasing Medicaid coverage** for doula services in low-income communities, which will reduce the number of maternal deaths, and provide safer medical procedures.

We also recommend supporting New York State Senate Bill S322, or the "**Chisholm Chance Act**," which effectively designates Northern Brooklyn and the Bronx as epicenters of Black maternal mortality and morbidity and **supports development of the hub model**.

Additionally, we endorse **expanding public awareness of all legislation related to maternal health**, including promoting pending bills to promote this cause. Through the women's caucus, we hope to acquire testimony and build greater support in this battle of women's rights.

Maternal health is a critical issue that affects us all. The Borough President is committed to improving maternal health and health equity to protect the rights of women everywhere, in the Bronx and beyond.

Monkeypox Outbreak: The Quick Facts

Monkeypox is a virus related to smallpox. The most common symptoms of the disease are a rash and sores, which can be very itchy and painful. These may be located all over the body or only in certain parts, such as the face, hands and feet, and on or inside the mouth, genitals, or anus. Flu-like symptoms may also occur, such as fever, swollen lymph nodes, headache, sore throat, and tiredness. Although monkeypox is rarely fatal, people with weakened immune systems, children under 8 years of age, people with a history of eczema, and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding may be more likely to become seriously ill or die. With the recent rise in cases in New York City and across the United States, the outbreak of monkeypox has been declared a national health emergency.

How is monkeypox spread?

Monkeypox can spread to anyone through close contact, such as direct contact with monkeypox rash, scabs, or body fluids from a person with monkeypox. It can also spread by touching objects that have been used by someone with monkeypox and contact with respiratory secretions. A pregnant person can spread the virus to their fetus. Most infections in the current outbreak have occurred through close contact during sex. Although monkeypox cases are currently higher within the LGBTQ+ community, it is crucial to recognize that anyone can get monkeypox.



Visual examples of monkeypox virus rash

How can monkeypox be prevented?

Monkeypox can be prevented by avoiding close skin-to-skin contact and sharing items with people who appear to have monkeypox symptoms. The CDC recommends vaccinations for people who have been exposed to monkeypox.

What is the Bronx doing to combat monkeypox?

The Bronx is working on improving equitable access to vaccines, advocating for vulnerable populations and removing stigma regarding monkey pox. In the Bronx, vaccines are available at NYC H+H/Gotham Health - Tremont, NYC H+H/Lincoln Hospital, and select private medical clinics and centers. You can make your appointment at vax4nyc.nyc.gov/patient/s/monkeypox or by calling 877-829-4692. Additionally, Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson has announced that she is working with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to launch a permanent sexual health clinic in the Bronx that will not only offer monkeypox testing, but antiviral treatments and other health services. Monkeypox spreads quickly and can be severely harmful for some people. With this in mind, we urge all Bronxites to take appropriate precautions against contracting the virus to protect yourself and our community.

DID YOU KNOW? AUGUST IS NATIONAL BREASTFEEDING MONTH

10 Benefits of Breastfeeding

For Infant

Lower risk of:

- 1) Serious colds
- 2) Ear & throat infections
- 3) Sudden infant death syndrome
- 4) Allergies
- 5) Obesity

For Mom

Lower risk of:

- 1) Breast cancer
- 2) Ovarian cancer
- 3) Post-partum depression
- 4) Postpartum hemorrhage
- 5) Type 2 Diabetes

Event Spotlight

This month, the Bronx Healthy Start Partnership hosted a **Titillating Tuesdays** workshop series to enhance and increase breastfeeding knowledge and skills!

August 2 ~ **Power of Breastfeeding: What you need to know**

August 16 ~ **Breastfeeding Journeys: The dos, the don'ts, the needs, and resources for feeding success**

August 23 ~ **Breastfeeding: Know Your Rights: Advocates from A Better Balance discuss workplace accommodations, paid leaves for families and lactating persons**

August 30th ~ **Circle of Support: A panel of lactation/birth workers and family members**

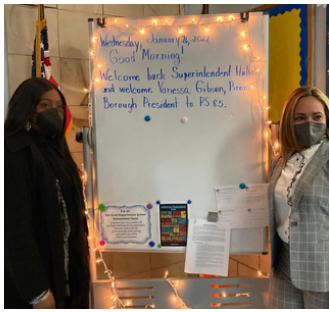


BP HEALTH EVENTS

WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

VISIT TO SCHOOL HYDROPONIC GARDEN

January 27 ~ P.S. 85



FOOD DISTRIBUTION & POP-UP PANTRIES

February 11 & 12 - Second Farms and Sonia Sotomayor Community Center



OPENING OF SCHOOL BASED HEALTH CLINIC

February 14 - PS/MS 004



PLANNED PARENTHOOD BRONX HEALTH CENTER EXPANSION

March 29 ~ 349 E 149th Street



NEW URBAN HEALTH PLAN FACILITY GROUND BREAKING

April 2 - 1095 Southern Blvd.



BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH EVENTS

March 21 - Meeting with Doulas, Midwives and Birthing Advocates



April 13 - Black Maternal Health Week BP Event



NATIONAL TRANSGENDER HIV TESTING DAY

April 18 - Borough Hall



DENIM DAY MARCH

WITH THE MAYOR'S OFFICE TO END DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE DENIM DAY NYC

April 24 - Grand Concourse and Mount Eden Parkway



NYPD COMMUNITY AFFAIRS' COMMUNITY BABY SHOWER

April 28 - The Northeast Bronx YMCA



Breathing Easier in the Bronx

Air pollution exposure is one of the most serious environmental threats to New Yorkers. It is linked to a variety of health risks, including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, asthma exacerbation, reduced lung function, and premature death. Each year, air pollution in New York City is estimated to cause more than 3,000 deaths, 2,000 hospital admissions for lung and heart conditions, and approximately 6,000 emergency department visits for asthma in children and adults.



According to New York City community health profiles, air pollution is higher in the Bronx than anywhere else in the city at 9.1 micrograms of fine particles per cubic meter, compared to the city's average of 8.6. In areas that have particularly concentrated manufacturing, this number rises as high as 9.8.

This pollution causes asthma and other respiratory illnesses, leading to health complications and premature deaths for people in the Bronx.

Aclima is a company that uses advanced technology in cars to monitor the location and amount of air pollutants, with the goal of using this data to help lower them. Pollutants include carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, methane, and various others.

The company is currently mapping out

block-by-block in NYC the hotspots for air pollution, and they plan on bringing their cars to the Bronx to help tackle air pollution exposure. An added benefit of this measure is an increase in local jobs, because the cars are driven by New Yorkers themselves.



Air quality can change block to block by 800%, and this technology is critical because it identifies which parts of the streets are most affected by air pollution, so that they can be appropriately targeted. With evolving technology such as the monitoring measures provided by Aclima, the Bronx is making progress in lowering air pollutants and improving the overall health of its residents, refining air quality and environmental conditions.

Addressing Legionnaire's Disease in the Bronx

In May of 2022, an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease emerged in the Highbridge neighborhood and bordering communities. Thirty individuals were infected and two died.

Legionnaires' disease is a type of pneumonia that is caused by the bacteria Legionella. Legionella thrives in warm water, so building plumbing systems - such as cooling towers, hot water tanks, and evaporative condensers of large air-conditioning systems - are places where Legionella can thrive.



The sources of the latest outbreak were four cooling towers in Highbridge. The towers were disinfected by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in May.

This is not the first time The Bronx has dealt with Legionnaires. In the summer of 2015, an outbreak of the disease in The

Bronx led to a total of 138 cases and 16 deaths, making it the largest Legionnaire's outbreak in NYC history. 55 cooling towers were located, sampled, and tested for Legionella, and all cooling towers that tested positive for the bacteria were disinfected.



Since the 2015 outbreak, Borough President Gibson has worked hard to prevent and manage Legionnaires in The Bronx. In her previous role on the New York City Council representing the 16th city district, Councilmember Gibson advocated for and passed legislation in 2018 to have all cooling towers registered with the city. This allows for new clusters to be more easily found and tracked, lowering infection rates in future outbreaks.

OFFICE OF THE BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT
VANESSA L. GIBSON
AND
NYC DEPT. OF HEALTH & MENTAL HYGIENE
HOST

Highbridge Community Stakeholders Meeting

Monday, June 13th, 2022
6:30pm-7:30pm
Legionnaires Updates

Webex Link Below:

<https://nycdahmh.webex.com/nycdahmh/jah?MTID=3a48744d12213336af8b1351a8d>

During the latest outbreak, Borough President Gibson spearheaded town halls and community meetings in Highbridge to increase access to health and social services and to provide local residents with public health education on Legionnaires prevention and management. Borough President Gibson is committed to continuing to partner with public health experts, city officials, and the local community to prevent future Legionnaires outbreaks.

Dear Vanessa L,

Dear Vanessa Gibson,

I was raised in the South Bronx and had a pretty normal childhood: walks to school in the mornings with my dad, playdates with friends, and trips to the park. Except the nearest park was a 20 minute walk away and almost every 8 year old there had to clutch their asthma pump in their fist as they ran to play with friends.

Capping the Cross Bronx is an amazing theory, but the idea to decrease air pollution in the underprivileged neighborhood that is the South Bronx is long overdue. The high rates of asthma among young children of color is only one example of how racism is built into our infrastructure. So I ask you, Ms. Gibson, to help change the system we are forced to conform to and help the current issue that is environmental racism in the South Bronx.

Best,
Ashley Avila



Illustration by Ashley Avila

Dear Ashley,

Thank you for reaching out. Your letter and the accompanying painting were very moving, as is the concern for the Bronx. There is a great momentum to get the Cross Bronx Expressway capped along the densely populated neighborhoods with the highest asthma rates in NYC, due to the pollution from trucks and cars.

I've joined Congressman Ritchie Torres and other Bronx leaders to push for the needed federal funding, and there is an infrastructure study underway to see how it can be done. If you look through this newsletter you'll see there are other exciting developments in the Bronx to monitor and eliminate air pollution. Also, since October of 2021, plans have been announced at the city and state level to make all school buses 100% electric. Similar plans are in motion for the produce distribution trucks out of Hunts Point, an epicenter for food commerce in the Northeast U.S.

I greatly appreciate you speaking up about this issue. It is advocacy like yours that influences the pace of progress towards correcting social, economic and environmental injustices. You are a steward of our future, and you've taken on an important leadership action. Please keep the faith and know that your efforts will shape the awareness of many others. That is why of many, your letter was published in our first newsletter of my Health & Human Services division.

You can be sure that when the next steps towards capping the Cross Bronx happen, I will write to let you know.

Sincerely yours,
Vanessa L. Gibson

**For mental health
crises
call 988**

**Para crisis
de salud mental
llame 988**

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides free, compassionate, and confidential care and support to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This includes mental health, substance use, suicide, and emotional crises.

If you or a loved one are in crisis, call/text 988 to be connected with a trained crisis counselor (para español, presione 2 después de marcar 988).

Interpretation services are available in over 150 languages.

What happens when you call?

In NYC, calls will be directed to the NYC Well 24/7 Hotline where mental health professionals provide support and referrals for treatments and resources.

If needed, the hotline staff can dispatch a Mobile Crisis Team, which includes mental health professionals, to an urgent but “non-emergency” situation.

***In the event of an emergency, or when someone is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others, the NYC Department of Health recommends calling 911 instead of 988. Calls to one line can be transferred to the other.**

Adapted from nyc.gov, fcc.gov, 988lifeline.org, The City, and the NYS OMH

**Invitation to Join a FOCUS GROUP project on...
Health Equity and Access to Care (HEAC) in NYC**

- **Eligibility:** Complete this short screener survey (<https://cunysph.me/Survey>) or scan a QR code (below) to access the survey.
- **If eligible:** You will be invited to join a 2-hour online (Zoom) focus group (weekday, weekend, evening options) to discuss experiences accessing healthcare services in NYC, including factors like race/ethnic identity/nationality, health insurance, healthcare services utilized, and medical settings.
- **For your time:** Participants will receive **\$40 for participating** in the focus group.
- **Questions:** Please contact the Project Coordinator at Alanna.Cruz@sph.cuny.edu.
- **Approval:** This project was approved by the City University of New York (CUNY) Institutional Review Board (protocol #2022-0401-PHHP).

You may be eligible if you:

- Are a current New York City resident
- Have accessed, or tried to access, healthcare services within the past year at a hospital in NYC
- Have a health insurance status of insured (private, Medicaid, Medicare) or are not insured
- Identify as African-American/Black, Asian, Latino/Latinx/Hispanic, and/or White
- Are 18 years or older
- Are able to speak English



QR Corner

Check out these local resources & services and interesting health articles!

**The Bronx
Health Link
Women & Infant
Health Advocacy**



**Bronx Health
REACH
Health and Social
Needs Services**



**Montefiore
Medical Center
Community
Relations**



**The 988 Crisis
Lifeline Offers
Help Instead of
Handcuffs
Medpage Article**

For more news & updates,
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social media!



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