

Maternal Mortality Review Committee Policies and Procedures

I. Overview

The Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) is a multidisciplinary committee focused on reviewing causes of maternal death. The committee and associated efforts are housed within the Maternal and Child Health Program at the Connecticut Department of Public Health.

The purpose of the review is to determine the causes of maternal mortality in Connecticut and identify both medical and non-medical interventions to improve systems of care. **Maternal mortality includes deaths occurring during pregnancy up to one year from the end of pregnancy.** Information is gathered from electronic birth and death files, death certificates, medical records, medical examiner reports, obituaries, and other pertinent sources of information. Records are abstracted by a trained abstractor and de-identified case narratives are reviewed by a committee of experts from diverse disciplines and areas of the state.

The goals of committee review and associated work are to:

- a. Determine the annual number of maternal deaths related to pregnancy (pregnancy-related mortality ratio).
- b. Identify trends and risk factors
- c. Develop actionable strategies to eliminate preventable maternal deaths

This review process is intended to be educational and prevention-oriented. The following steps are taken to ensure an effective review of each case:

- a. Share, question and clarify all case information
- b. Determine pregnancy-relatedness, underlying cause of death and whether the death could have been prevented
- c. Identify contributing factors
- d. Discuss recommendations to decrease, modify or eliminate contributing factors

II. Statutory Authority

The maternal mortality review is conducted pursuant to Connecticut § P.A. 18-150 and Department of Public Health rules and regulations pertaining to the reporting of selected causes of mortality in Connecticut. The Department may have access to medical records of fatalities that occur in association with pregnancy or for up to one year from the end of pregnancy.

III. Committee Structure

The MMRC is comprised of providers and prevention practitioners from across the state, including Department staff members and external stakeholders. Representation includes obstetrics and gynecology, forensic pathology, maternal fetal medicine, anesthesiology, cardiology, critical care, nursing, psychiatry, mental/behavioral health, community health workers, doulas, domestic violence, community advocates and public health.

Committee members are appointed by the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health, Connecticut State Medical Society, or other organizations as described in Connecticut § P.A. 18-150. The MMRC co-chairs may designate other persons that they feel will benefit the committee. Recruitment of new MMRC members will occur as needed unless a specific type of expertise is required during the year for a case review (example: anesthesiology). The Department will engage the MMRC to identify and recruit interested individuals as needed; however, the Department will maintain the authority to appoint the membership.

The MMRC membership will not exceed 30 members, excluding Department MMR staff. MMRC members do not have a term limit for their volunteer stewardship.

IV. Committee Member Responsibilities

All MMRC members will serve in a volunteer capacity and will not receive compensation for their participation in the review process.

MMRC members who are not Department employees are not covered under the Department's statutory authority to conduct maternal mortality review work. Thus, external members may not:

- a. Request records themselves
- b. Follow up on records requested but not received
- c. Review personal health information that is not de-identified
- d. Access to identified content in the MMRC Data System

Failure to comply with the defined responsibilities will result in removal from the MMRC. Members who are removed from the MMRC are ineligible for future participation.

All MMRC members must annually sign the Department MMR Confidentiality Agreement (Attachment II: MMRC Confidentiality Statement). This will be done at the start of each calendar year, or as new members are designated. The forms will be electronically retained by the Department and considered effective as long as the relevant hard case files exist. Committee members will be reminded at the start of each meeting that all information discussed in the reviews must remain confidential and may not be used for reasons other than for the maternal mortality review.

All MMRC members must abide by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act's (HIPPA) Privacy Rule when engaging in case review discussions. This rule requires appropriate safeguards to protect the privacy of personal health information, and sets limits and rules regarding the release of information without patient consent. All MMRC members will be reminded at the start of each meeting that they must adhere to confidentiality, and may not expose patient-identifying information about a case should they recognize it. An MMRC member may, at any time, request additional information from Department regarding confidentiality.

V. Confidentiality

The Department will ensure strict compliance with our state statutes, which requires that the Department protect the confidentiality of maternal mortality information. To ensure the protection of committee members, individuals, families and providers, the MMRC will adhere to the following safeguards:

- a. All MMRC meetings will be held in private. The MMRC is not a policy-making body, and thus is not subject to the open meeting requirements.
- b. Members of the public or press will not be allowed at MMRC meetings. If members of the public or press show up uninvited at a meeting they will be notified that the MMRC meetings are not

open to the public and will be asked to leave. Members of the public or press will be offered the opportunity to engage with Department staff about the work at a separate time outside of the MMRC meetings.

c. Case-associated information will only be available for review and discussion at the MMRC meetings.

- a. Agenda and meeting notes may be distributed outside of the meeting time and will not contain case-associated information.
- b. MMRC members must meet in person to review information.
- c. MMRC members must submit all meeting materials and papers with case-associated notes back to Department staff at the end of the MMRC meetings.
- d. All case summaries reviewed will be redacted per confidentiality standards.
- e. A MMRC member may request to review a de-identified record for additional information pertinent to the case review. The record(s) will be de-identified by Department staff.

VI. Conflict of Interest

An MMRC member may recognize a case regardless of the Department's compliance with confidentiality standards. If this should happen, the member shall not disclose that they recognize the case, and may not discuss the committee's discussion of the case outside of the MMRC meeting or with non-MMRC members. The member may choose to provide additional information that is pertinent to the case review, but must adhere to confidentiality standards, including ensuring that no identifiers are relayed.

VII. Agency Conflict Resolution

The MMRC is not a peer review committee, and, thus, does not seek to examine the performance of individual practitioners, hospitals or other agencies. The MMRC is a professional process aimed at improving systems of care for pregnant and postpartum women.

While committee members may have concerns or disagreements regarding a case, the review of maternal deaths is not an opportunity for the MMRC to criticize provider or agency decisions. As the appointing agency of the MMRC, the Department reserves the right to ensure discussions remain focused on the meeting's intended purpose. All information discussed by committee members in the reviews will remain confidential and may not be used for reasons other than that which are intended.