

# 9 POINTS ON A HEALTHY BIRTHING JOURNEY

1

## Pre-Pregnancy Preparation

Pre-pregnancy health education, planning, and access to contraceptives can help prevent unintended pregnancies, which have a greater risk of babies being born prematurely or at a low birth weight.<sup>1</sup>



**1 OUT OF 3**

New Arkansas mothers who experienced an unintended pregnancy in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

2

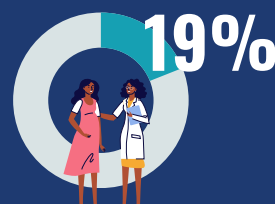
## Initiation of Prenatal Care

Prenatal visits should start in the first trimester. For uncomplicated first pregnancies, visits should occur:

- Every 4 weeks through week 28.
- Every 2 weeks for weeks 28 through 36.
- Weekly thereafter.

High-risk pregnancies require more visits.<sup>3</sup>

New Arkansas mothers who received inadequate\*<sup>4</sup> prenatal care in 2023:



3

## Education and Supports

Prenatal classes, providers of choice, and birthing companions such as doulas provide emotional and educational support to parents as they navigate pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period.

Arkansas has a community-based certification process for doulas. The state is moving to join 23 other states and DC in providing Medicaid coverage for doula services.<sup>5</sup>

4

## Safest Method of Delivery

For most pregnancies, a vaginal delivery is a safer method of delivery than a cesarean birth (C-section), with a lower risk of maternal morbidity and mortality.<sup>6</sup>

High-risk pregnancies should receive specialty care.

**34%** Arkansas births performed by C-section, 2019-2021.<sup>7</sup>



\*Prenatal care starting in or after the fifth month or less than half of the appropriate number of visits for the infant's gestational age.

5

## Family Support and Bonding

Family supports such as parental leave, child care assistance, breastfeeding counseling, and safety education help a new mom as she adjusts to postpartum changes and bonds with her child.



Arkansas infants exclusively breastfed at 6 months in 2025.<sup>8</sup>

6

## Depression Screening

Mothers should be screened for depression and anxiety at least once during pregnancy and in the first year after delivery. Screening should be coupled with appropriate follow-up and treatment when indicated.<sup>9</sup>

New Arkansas mothers with postpartum depression in 2021:<sup>2</sup>



7

## Home Visits

Home visiting programs provide families with support from trained professionals in the families' homes. These professionals may include nurses, social workers, or early childhood specialists.

6%

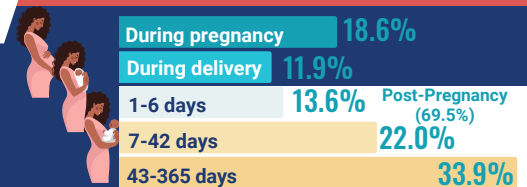


Arkansas children ages 0-2 years served by home visiting programs in 2022.<sup>10</sup>

8

## Postpartum Visits

Within 12 weeks after birth, a mom should undergo a comprehensive postpartum checkup and continue to receive medical care during the postpartum period, as needed.<sup>11</sup> Contraception and urgent maternal warning signs should also be discussed.



Between 2018 and 2021, most pregnancy-related deaths in Arkansas occurred during the postpartum period.<sup>12</sup>

9

## Well-Child Visits

Well-child visits, recommended preventive checkups starting at infancy, help parents:

- Track growth and development milestones.
- Discuss specific concerns about a child's health and well-being.
- Ensure the child receives appropriate vaccines to prevent illnesses.<sup>13</sup>



50%

Arkansas children covered by Medicaid or CHIP who did not receive 6 or more recommended well-child visits in the first 15 months of life in 2023.<sup>14</sup>