



Department of Health | Office of Mental Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner of Health, DOH

ANN MARIE T. SULLIVAN, M.D.
Commissioner of Mental Health, OMH

May 25, 2018

Dear Colleague:

We are writing to provide important information about maternal depression. As many as 1 in 7 women experience some form of depression during pregnancy or within 12 months after giving birth. The good news is maternal depression is highly treatable if identified early. Untreated maternal depression may worsen over time.

While maternal depression can affect any pregnant woman or new mom, regardless of age, income, race, ethnicity or education, some women are at greater risk. Risk factors for maternal depression include poverty, substance use, low social support, family and personal history of depression, and history of domestic violence.

Governor Andrew Cuomo has directed the Department of Financial Services to adopt regulations that will require private insurers to reimburse for maternal depression screening and referral for diagnosis and treatment as appropriate. The New York State (NYS) Medicaid program currently provides reimbursement for these services¹.

As a health care provider, you may be the first to recognize signs of depression. Incorporating an [evidence-based screening tool](#) (NYS licensed clinics generally use the PHQ-9) into prenatal visits, postpartum checkups or routine well-baby visits provides opportunities to discuss and look for signs of depression.

Behavioral and mental health providers, likewise, may recognize signs of maternal depression with their pregnant and/or newly parenting patients. Using an evidence-based screening tool as part of routine care provides opportunities to identify emerging signs of maternal depression, apart from existing behavioral and mental health diagnoses, as well as to monitor for improvement.

Postpartum depression is the most common morbidity associated with childbirth; it is a problem for moms and, untreated, can have a permanent impact on children. Clinical findings demonstrate a distinct connection between maternal depression and an increased level of emotional and functional problems in infants, prepubescent, adolescent and adult children. Therefore, it is critical to identify perinatal women with depression early to get them the care they need.

¹ https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/program/update/2016/2016-08.htm#postpartum

To find mental health providers, you can visit the NYS Office of Mental Health's (OMH) [directory of licensed providers Portal Pages](#). The directory is a searchable list of programs licensed or funded by the OMH. Users can:

- Search for mental health programs by county or program category;
- View program details such as program name, address and phone number; and
- Click on any county on the map to view all programs in that county.

For additional community resources, the Postpartum Resource Center of New York maintains a [resource directory](#) for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.

First State-Operated Outpatient Service Set to Open

In response to the Governor's directive to develop "cutting-edge specialty programs to treat maternal depression," OMH will launch the first State-operated intensive outpatient service by the end of the month at Hutchings Psychiatric Center in Syracuse. Additional programs are expected to open later in the summer.

Additionally, OMH is in the process of making *Project TEACH* resources specific to maternal depression available statewide, which will provide consultation, education and training on the symptoms and treatment of maternal depression to pediatric primary care providers (PCPs) and to obstetricians and gynecologists.

Through *Project TEACH*, these medical providers will have access to mental health experts who can provide telephone consultation about patients' mental health needs.

OMH will also be sponsoring several trainings throughout the summer and fall of 2018 to increase awareness of maternal depression, symptoms, screening and treatment options. OMH will provide two Webinars in the months ahead, as well as a conference on Maternal Depression for medical practitioners and mental health professionals in the Fall of 2018.

The NYS Department of Health website has resources for clinicians on the following topics:

- [Screening and screening tools](#),
- [Treatment options](#)
- [Tool kits and guidelines](#)

The [National Child & Maternal Health Education Program](#) has reliable and engaging information for consumers.

It is imperative for providers to work with their patients to identify those with maternal depression and treat or refer them, as needed, for treatment.

Sincerely,



Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner of Health
New York State Department of Health



Ann Marie T. Sullivan, M.D.
Commissioner
New York State Office of Mental Health