

HEALTH & FITNESS

# 'How do I not die in childbirth?' Black women more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes



By [Akilah Davis](#)

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RALEIGH, N.C. (WTVD) -- When Kylee McCombs first learned she and her husband were expecting two years ago, she panicked. She was no stranger to the data around black women dying a pregnancy-related death.

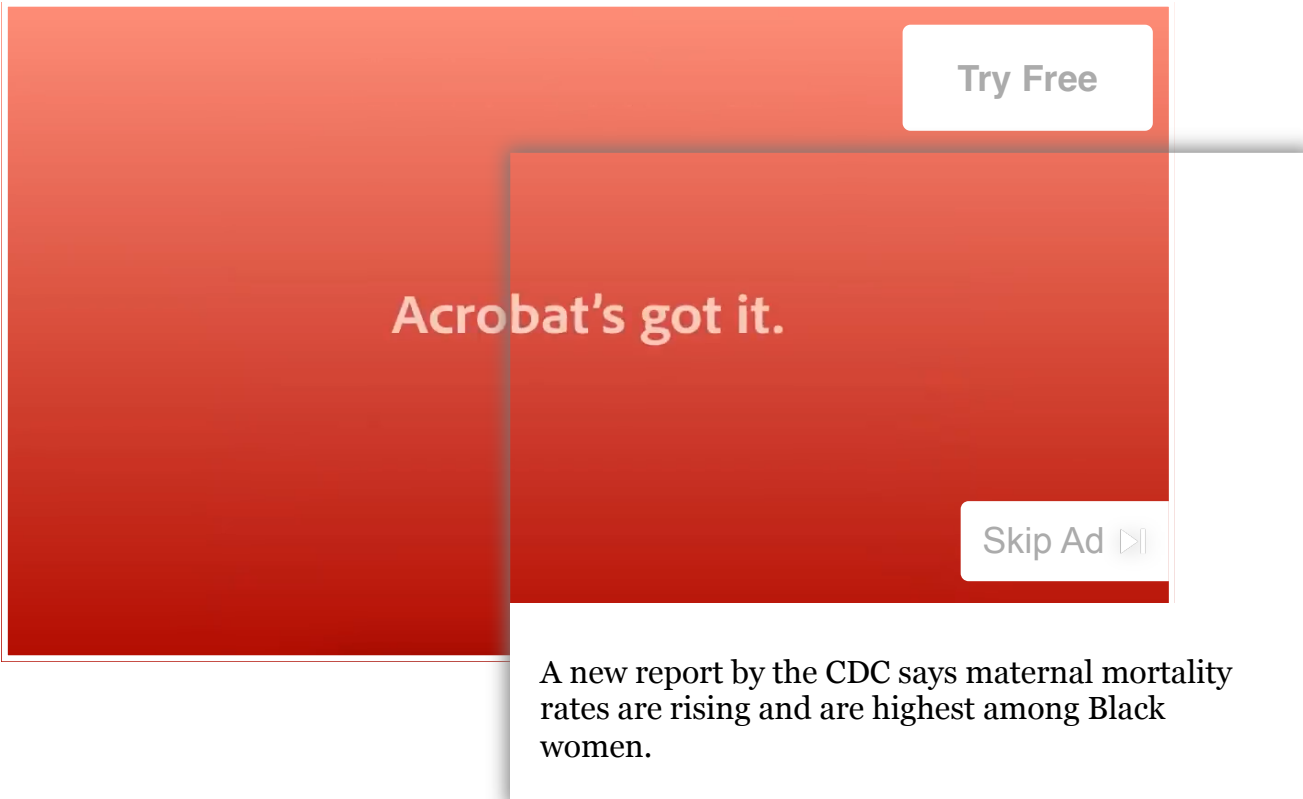
"The very first thought that ran through my mind was like 'oh my God' women who look like me die when they have babies," she said. "So I googled how do I not die during childbirth. The very first thing that popped up is hire a doula and consider a home birth."

McCombs welcomed her son to the world with the help of her doula Ste'Keira Shepperson, owner of Triangle Doulas of Color.

Shepperson said because of maternal mortality rates more Black women are turning to doulas.

"They're reaching out for someone to support them through pregnancy and help them navigate and be there during birth," she said.

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A new report by the CDC says maternal mortality rates are rising and are highest among Black women.

A new report by the CDC says maternal mortality rates are rising. Rates jumped from 23.8 deaths to 32.9 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021. Data also shows mortality rates are the highest in Black women who are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.

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"We have to worry about racism in the health system, how we are perceived when we come in and what is the quality of the care. So it's not being able to be in the care, but being able to receive the same or appropriate care," said Duke professor of medicine Dr. Keisha Bentley Edwards.

Her suggested pregnant women of color build up an advocacy team with a midwife or doula.

"Tell your doctor, 'I want to come out of this alive,'" she said.

It's a concern felt by McCombs who is expecting again and due in June with twin boys. She is leaning on her doula for support.

"It provided an extra layer of support and advocacy between you and your healthcare provider," she said.

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