



TOXIC

A BLACK WOMAN'S STORY

A film depicting the reality of a day
in a Black pregnant woman's life.

"I wish what was represented in the film was fiction or embellished, but it is reality."

– Health Care Leader

Black women and their babies have historically endured racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality. In addition to that, structural racism and implicit bias further threatens their health. Hospitals and health care providers are increasingly recognizing the impact of structural racism and implicit bias on maternal health. To foster productive conversation, the American Hospital Association is encouraging hospitals and health systems to use the short film **Toxic: A Black Woman's Story** as an educational tool. Developed by First Year Cleveland's Pregnancy and Infant Loss Committee and the Healthy Neighborhoods Committee of Healthy Cleveland, the film tells the story of Nina, a Black, pregnant, affluent lawyer, to bring awareness to the daily, multi-layered stressors, biases and microaggressions that drive inequitable maternal and infant mortality rates for Black women. A corresponding discussion guide facilitates solution-driven conversations about how health care organizations can address structural racism.

FACTS

- Every year, **50,000 women** suffer a severe maternal complication during labor and delivery, while **700** die from giving birth.ⁱ
- Black women are **three to four times more likely** to experience a pregnancy-related death than their white counterpart, and five times more likely even with a college education.ⁱⁱ
- More than **80%** of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable, and mental health is the prominent cause.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Infant mortality and pre-term births are **disproportionately higher** in Black babies and moms.^{iv}

i. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/disparities-pregnancy-related-deaths/infographic.html>

ii. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0919-pregnancy-related-deaths.html>

iii. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>

iv. <https://www.kff.org/report-section/racial-disparities-in-maternal-and-infant-health-an-overview-issue-brief/>

CONSIDERATIONS TO EXPLORE

Screening "Toxic" creates space for individuals from all backgrounds to share perspectives and strategies to transform Black maternal health. The AHA has facilitated viewing of the film for a variety of health care organizations. Below are some considerations health care organizations can explore to provide more equitable maternal health care:

Leadership Engagement

- Obtain leadership buy-in early on.
- Advocate and support change, but recognize change takes time.
- Collaborate beyond traditional partners around equity as the common mission.
- Host conversations with grass roots initiatives, community members and stakeholders and members to build consciousness of layered issues people encounter.

Systemic Changes

- Build diversity in the workforce.
- Hold team members accountable for designing and implementing solutions.
- Integrate training on implicit bias such as [Awareness to Action: Dismantling Bias in Maternal and Infant Healthcare™](#), active listening, culturally competent care, sensitive conversations, to build consciousness of issues one maybe unaware of.
- Train providers in conducting sensitive conversations with patients, as described in [Screening for Social Needs: Guiding Care Teams to Engage Patients](#).

Personal Behavior Changes

- Assess and understand your own implicit biases.
- Practice empathy and introspection in patient and peer encounters.
- Learn to advocate in the moment of injustice, and hold yourself accountable.
- Encourage people to tell their stories and listen.
- Value lived experiences as a data point to better understand a person's overall health.

USING “TOXIC” IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Hospitals and health care systems, community-based, non-profit, or social service organizations are integrating this film in their health equity efforts. From urban to rural settings, this educational tool sparks a refocus on how health care organizations deliver care to Black women.

- With the goal of preparing the new generation of health care professionals to understand the myriad of challenges Black pregnant women face, **Atrium Health Navicent**, in Georgia, screened the film in-person and virtually at Mercer University School of Medicine. The screening engaged a panel made up of Atrium Health Navicent’s CMO, a department of public health representative, a postpartum doula, an OBGYN and a local maternal mortality researcher to a lead discussion on social biases within the health care system and how the community can help to improve minority maternal health. Atrium Health Navicent plans to partner with local academic centers and nursing schools for future screenings with class participation. Atrium Health Navicent also plans to engage with civic and social organizations and involve the community with the panel forum. Additionally, Atrium Health Navicent mandates implicit bias training for all providers and nurses, as it is embedded in its educational curriculum.
- **Colorado Hospital Association** developed an 11-part virtual learning series, Fundamentals of Social Determinants of Health in Hospitals, to convene Colorado hospitals and dive into the different aspects of social determinants of health and their impact on health equity. As part of the series, CHA screened “Toxic” and created a safe space for reflection and discussion on the cumulative effects and consequences of chronic stress caused by health inequities.
- **Summa Health**, an Ohio-based hospital system, is screening the film as part of its Advancing Women’s Health Equity Series. Offered to current and incoming medical residents, the series uses the film as a tool to engage residents in a healthy discussion around bias and race, creating a safe space for residents to share their experiences interfacing patients from different backgrounds, hold themselves accountable for their biases and also recognize and challenge practices within the system that are inequitable. Based on oral and written feedback, participants were moved to action as they formed eight new committees to improve processes and maternal health outcomes.

HOW TO GET STARTED

AHA members can purchase “Toxic” as a tool to raise awareness and spark conversations on maternal health, infant mortality, health equity, racism and racial inequalities.

AHA-member organizations that are non-profit hospitals and health systems can login at www.aha.org/toxicshortfilm to access discount code and purchase the film and discussion guide for \$375 (valid until April 30, 2023). For-profit entities, national and state associations can view prices and discuss pricing for your own membership at www.toxicshortfilm.com. To learn more, view [Film Use and License](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#). All proceeds will provide healing support resources for families in Cuyahoga County who have experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, or the loss of a baby before age one.

Tips for Screening “Toxic: A Black Woman’s Story”

- Select a facilitator experienced in moderating conversations on racism, health disparities and equity.
- Determine your goal.
- Invite partners, internally and externally, to discuss and determine solutions from a multisector lens.
- Ensure health care professionals from health equity, maternal health and behavioral health are involved in planning or facilitating dialogue.
- Promote the screening by previewing the trailer of the film, and encouraging pre-viewing questions.
- Integrate a trigger warning in all communications about the film, live or virtual.
- Allow a moment of silence for viewers to gather their thoughts.
- Create a safe space for open dialogue post-viewing, and empower an action-oriented discussion.
- Gather and share support resources.
- Encourage participants to identify an action item to take back.
- Gather feedback from participants to bring improvements to future screenings.