

Epilepsy and Maternity – July 2026

Key Points

- Women with epilepsy are ten times more likely to die during pregnancy than those without the condition.¹
- MBRRACE-UK² has identified epilepsy as one of the leading causes of maternal death in the UK. Recent reports found that epilepsy was the fifth leading direct cause and third leading indirect cause of maternal mortality, highlighting the need for consistent, high-quality care before, during and after pregnancy.
- Epilepsy Action has worked with NHS regions to develop guidelines, assessment tools and benchmarking systems to improve maternity outcomes and patient safety.
- Recent national maternity reviews have highlighted concerns about women not always being listened to, variation in care, and missed opportunities to identify and manage risk. These findings reinforce the need for improvements in care for higher-risk groups, including women with epilepsy.
- You can help to ensure that epilepsy is part of the national conversation around improving maternity care.

About Epilepsy and Maternity

Epilepsy is a neurological condition characterised by recurrent seizures. It introduces specific risks to pregnancy: a 2024 study of 4.5 million pregnancies found that epilepsy is associated with higher risk of death or severe morbidity to both mother and baby.³

MBRRACE-UK, the national confidential enquiry into maternal deaths, has consistently highlighted epilepsy as a significant cause of maternal mortality. Recent reviews found that many women who died had not received optimal specialist support before or during pregnancy, including gaps in pre-conception counselling, medication management and access to neurology services. The reports emphasise the importance of coordinated multidisciplinary care throughout pregnancy and the postnatal period.

This risk has been recognised in epilepsy's inclusion as one of the five conditions in the [Maternal Care Bundle](#), a set of standards established by NHS England to improve maternal mortality rates. However, the Bundle's implementation falls to individual ICBs, meaning there is limited opportunity to ensure that its lifesaving measures are being implemented nationally. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care recently established the [Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce](#) to implement the recommendations of [Baroness Amos's investigation](#) into maternity services. It is vital that the voices and experiences of women with epilepsy, and in particular those who are or have been pregnant, are fully reflected in the taskforce's work. Policy and practice improvements must be informed by those with lived experience to ensure changes lead to safer, more coordinated maternity care.

Epilepsy Action is a member of [one of the expert reference](#) groups, supporting the work of the Taskforce, helping to ensure that the needs and experiences of women with epilepsy are reflected in its recommendations.

¹ UK Obstetric Surveillance System, *Ninth Annual Report* (2015), p25. Available at <https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/assets/downloads/ukoss/annual-reports/UKOSS%20Annual%20Report%202015%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

² <https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/mbrance-uk/reports/maternal-reports/maternal-report-2021-2023>

³ Razaz et al, *Risk of Perinatal and Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Among Pregnant Women with Epilepsy*, JAMA Neurology (2024). Available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamaneurology/fullarticle/2822068>.

Improving Maternity Care

Epilepsy Action has developed clinical guidelines, audit tools, and a maternity provider self-assessment benchmarking tool which have been implemented by 56 maternity providers so far, across three NHSE regions. The providers have given very positive feedback, reporting that they now have a much better understanding of the improvements needed and how to make them. One provider has created a Specialist Epilepsy Midwife role based on the insights, and others have created more integrated maternity pathways. Additional NHS regions have expressed interest in adopting these tools, but we must ensure that these improvements are brought to bear on a national scale for the safety of women with epilepsy and their children.

Why This Matters Now

The Independent Investigation into [Maternity and Neonatal Services in England](#) (the Amos Review) published in June 2026 found that avoidable harm is still occurring across maternity services. Among its findings were concerns that women's voices were not always heard, services were fragmented, and opportunities to learn and improve were sometimes missed. These concerns reflect longstanding issues identified in maternity care for women with epilepsy, who often lack coordinated input from maternity, neurology and primary care teams.

[The Ockenden Review](#) (2026) identified similar issues, including missed opportunities to recognise deterioration, inconsistent escalation processes and failures to learn from previous incidents. MBRRACE reviews of epilepsy-related maternal deaths have repeatedly identified missed opportunities to recognise and respond to risk, alongside insufficient involvement of specialist epilepsy services.

What you can do:

The Amos Review has recommended the creation of the UK's first ever Maternity and Neonatal Commissioner. The Commissioner will work with the Taskforce to publish a comprehensive national action plan in December 2026, setting out priority actions and long-term reform to deliver safer, fairer care. We want to ensure the needs of women with epilepsy are considered as part of this plan and the adoption of proven approaches - like our guidelines and tools – are recommended.

- **Help us to ensure that the whole country benefits from the best quality of care** by encouraging NHS England and Integrated Care Boards to adopt Epilepsy Action's evidence-based pathways and tools nationally, to support consistent standards, better risk identification and consistent care nationwide.
- **Help us raise awareness of the impact of epilepsy within the national conversation about maternity.** It is important that the new Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce considers the specific needs of women with epilepsy and references them in their upcoming action plan.

About Epilepsy Action

Epilepsy Action is the UK's leading epilepsy charity, working for over 70 years to improve the lives of people with epilepsy by delivering support, improving clinical practice, influencing policy and educating the public.

To learn more about how you can help, please contact Daniel Jennings, Public Affairs Co-ordinator, at djennings@epilepsy.org.uk.