

# How to support employees through C-sections

A Cesarean section, or C-section, is the surgical delivery of a baby through incisions in the abdomen and uterus. The procedure can be lifesaving for birthing people and their babies during complications during pregnancy—but C-sections are also associated with higher risks in future births and health challenges. “We’re always trying to decrease the rate of primary C-sections or first C-sections,” [explains Ericka Quezada-York](#), a midwife and CNM. “It is an option in cases that we truly need it.” By providing comprehensive resources and care, employers can play an important role in supporting their employees in this crucial moment of their family-building journeys.

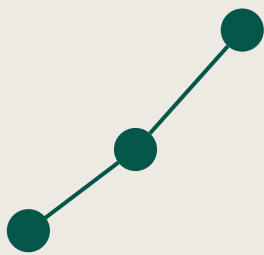


## By the numbers



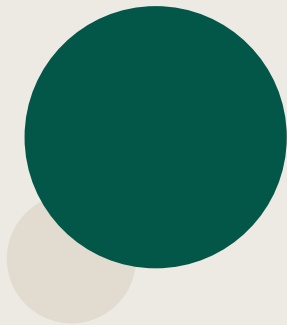
32%

Almost 32% of all births in the U.S. are delivered by C-section, a rate that has been rising over the past few decades.



\$9,000

On average, C-sections cost \$9,000 more than vaginal delivery.



↑ 50%

Overall U.S. employer spending on employee maternity costs rose 50% from 2008 to 2018, largely because of the surging rates of C-sections.

## Types of C-sections

There are two types of C-sections: planned and unplanned.

### Planned C-sections

To ensure the safety and comfort of the birthing person, a planned C-section is scheduled well in advance of delivery day. One of the most common reasons for a scheduled C-section is because a birthing person has delivered this way in the past.

### Unplanned and emergency C-sections

The need for unplanned C-sections often doesn't present itself until right before or during labor. The reasons for an unplanned C-section can include:

- Labor slows, stops, or doesn't start at all, despite strong contractions
- The baby's size is too large for the birthing person's pelvis
- The position of the baby prevents a safe, head-first delivery
- The baby's heart rate indicates distress

## The increased risk of C-sections

While C-sections are the most common obstetric surgery performed today, there are greater risks associated with the procedure. Research shows that Cesarean delivery is associated with 2.7 times the risk of negative health outcomes after childbirth compared to vaginal delivery. "The biggest risks of C-sections are similar to the risks of any type of surgery, which includes blood loss and the risk of infection," says Quezada-York. "With a C-section, you typically lose two to three times more blood than with a vaginal birth." Additional risks can include a longer recovery period, a higher potential for postpartum depression, and increased risks for future pregnancy.

## Race and C-sections

From 2018 to 2020, C-section rates were highest for Black birthing people (35.8%) and Asian birthing people (32.6%). But what's driving increased C-sections along racial lines? There are many reasons for racial disparities in care, including:

- Providers underestimating and undertreating factors in pregnancy that could later contribute to Cesarean risk
- Patients not feeling heard and being unable to express their needs to their providers
- Providers not acting on communicated preferences from minority patients

“One of the biggest risk factors for primary C-sections is race,” says Quezada-York. “Over the past five years, as we’ve talked more about the maternal mortality crisis and obstetric racism, I’m finding people more willing to acknowledge that the high rate of C-sections is part of it.”

## How can employers help?

Employers can play an important role in supporting birthing people through their pregnancy and making sure they have the resources necessary to make the best decisions for themselves and their families. To best support employees, employers can:

**Offer preconception care**, which addresses risks to birthing people and partners before conception, and can reduce C-section rates through education and risk identification

**Provide digital care** so people can have unlimited access to providers when they need it and more opportunity to catch any issues early, decreasing rates of C-sections

**Ensure access to care matching**, helping members connect with providers who share their racial or ethnic identity

**Understand that it may take longer for birthing parents to return to work** from a C-section due to the physical toll of the surgery. Recovery for C-sections can take six to eight weeks and may include longer hospital stays than vaginal birth.

