



LEGAL REFORM AND WOMEN'S HEALTH

What you should know about New Jersey's medical liability crisis and women's access to care

- New Jersey's OBGYNs pay the seventh highest malpractice premiums in the nation, encouraging them to reduce their services or practice out-of-state, where premiums are lower.
- 90 percent of physicians enrolled in the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) have been sued at least once. Merely being named in a lawsuit can force premiums higher for OBGYNs, and the average OBGYN is sued 2.7 times over the course of a career. Physicians, therefore, are required to prepare themselves with sufficient insurance should they find themselves – or others with whom they share a practice or support staff – to be the victim of frivolous litigation.
- New doctors wanting to practice obstetrics face disproportionate hurdles. In addition to student debt, high premiums dictate that new OBGYNs will have to deliver scores of babies each quarter in order to remain financially solvent.
- The fear of being sued is one of the biggest barriers to care in New Jersey. Nearly 60 percent of OBGYNs have made changes to their practice during the last three years because of the high risk of liability claims.
- 35 percent of OBGYNs have either decreased the number of high-risk obstetric patients or have ceased providing obstetric care altogether, making it harder for women with high-risk pregnancies to access specialized care. If this trend continues, New Jersey women in underserved communities can expect to find that they cannot get the prenatal and gynecologic care they need, and many will not be able to find doctors to deliver their babies.
- New Jersey has the highest caesarean rate in the nation. More than 1/3 of New Jersey babies are now delivered by caesarean section. OBGYNs frequently cite the fear of being sued as a chief reason for this high number.
- On average, New Jersey's OBGYNs stop practicing at age 48 – an age that was once considered the midpoint of an OBGYN's career.
- The current gap between doctors and patients in New Jersey is 12 percent. A study by the New Jersey Council of Teaching Hospitals estimates that New Jersey will be short an additional 3,000 doctors in the next decade unless comprehensive changes are made to our state's liability system. If no changes are made, it increases the likelihood that the doctor shortage will reach crisis levels.

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