



TODAY, IN 1967

George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi Party, was shot to death in the parking lot of a shopping center in Arlington, Va; former party member John Patler was later convicted of the killing.

Rate of U.S. mothers dying in childbirth rising

By Mike Stobbe
Associated Press

ATLANTA — U.S. women are dying from childbirth at the highest rate in decades, new government figures show.

Though the risk of death is very small, experts believe increasing maternal obesity and a jump in Caesarean sections are partly to blame. Some numbers crunchers note that a change in how such deaths are reported also may be a factor.

“Those of us who look at this a lot say it’s probably a little bit of both,”

said Dr. Jeffrey King, an obstetrician who led a recent New York state review of maternal deaths.

The maternal mortality rate rose to 13 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2004, according to statistics the National Center for Health Statistics released this week.

The rate was 12 per 100,000 live births in 2003 — the first time the maternal death rate rose to more than 10 since 1977.

To be sure, death from childbirth remains fairly rare in the United States. The death of infants is much more common — the nation’s infant

mortality rate was 679 per 100,000 live births in 2004.

Some health statisticians note the total number of maternal deaths — still fewer than 600 each year — is small.

It’s so small that 50 to 100 extra deaths could raise the rate, said Donna Hoyert, a health scientist with the National Center for Health Statistics. Also, in 2003, there was a change in death certificate questions in the nation’s most populous state, California, and in Montana and Idaho. That may have resulted in more deaths being linked to child-

birth — enough push up the 2003 rate, Hoyert said.

Some researchers point to the rising Caesarean section rate, now 29 percent of all births — far higher than what public health experts say is appropriate. Like other surgeries, they come with risks related to anesthesia, infections and blood clots.

Experts also say obesity may be a factor. Heavier women are more prone to diabetes and other complications, and they may have excess tissue and larger babies that make vaginal delivery more problematic, which can lead to more Caesareans.