



**North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Public Affairs**

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**North Carolina's infant mortality rates drop in 2008;
minority infant mortality rate is lowest in state's history**

RALEIGH – Infant mortality rates dropped in North Carolina in 2008 and the minority infant mortality rate was the lowest in the state's history, state health officials announced today. A total of 130,758 North Carolina babies were born last year. The state's total infant mortality rate was 8.2 deaths per 1,000 live births, 3.5 percent lower than the 2007 rate of 8.5.

National figures are not yet available for 2008 data, but North Carolina is currently ranked 44th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, with an average rate of 8.5 over 2005 and 2006. The national infant mortality average for that same time period was 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births.

In 2008, North Carolina's minority infant mortality rate was 13.5 deaths per 1,000 live births, nearly a 3 percent drop from the 2007 rate of 13.9. There were 37,530 live births to minority mothers, and 508 babies of minority race died before the age of 1 during 2008.

The state's white infant death rate also fell in 2008, from 6.3 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2007 to 6.0 last year, a 4.8 percent drop. There were 93,228 births to white mothers in 2008, and 558 deaths of white babies under age 1.

"It is good news that our infant mortality rates dropped in 2008, especially among minorities," said State Health Director Jeffrey Engel. "Although racial disparities persist, the decrease in the minority death rate is a promising sign that we are moving in the right direction. We want all North Carolina babies to be born healthy and to stay healthy."

"Community-based organizations and local health departments have been working diligently to reach families of color, to help them access health services, to provide them with care coordination and support, and to give them positive, helpful health information," Engel said.

One such program is in Lee County, where outreach workers in the Sister Love Program educate African American women of childbearing age about folic acid, exercise and healthy eating, child development, diabetes and other factors that impact infant mortality. This program is one of 14 Healthy Beginning sites in the state addressing minority infant mortality reduction.

(MORE)



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A Sister Love client said, "I have been in Sister Love for about a year. I have been in the series on child development and healthy living. The information has helped me with my 20-month-old boy and my own health. Recently, when I had a kidney stone, I called my outreach worker and she took me to the hospital and made sure my son was okay. I am in this community by myself and my mother is in another state. This program has given me confidence and the ability to make sure I'm healthy and my child also."

Of the 130,758 live births last year, 72,014 were white non-Hispanic (55.1%); 31,108 were black non-Hispanic (23.8%); 21,619 were Hispanic (16.5 percent); and 1,754 were American Indian (1.3%). The remaining 4,263 births (3.3%) were of other races. Those proportions have remained about the same over the past three years.

The 1,066 deaths of babies under 1 year old in 2008 were due to a variety of causes. Nearly 20 percent (210) of the deaths were due to prematurity and low birth weight, and 19 percent (203) were attributed to birth defects. Unintentional injury deaths dropped, accounting for slightly more than 3 percent (35) of the infant deaths in 2008.

Minority women continue to experience markedly higher rates of low birthweight births (13.5% in 2008) than do white women (7.3% in 2008). These higher rates are responsible for much of the gap between white and minority birth outcomes, health officials say.

In 2008, the number of infant deaths related to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, (SIDS) increased, accounting for 136 deaths in children under 1 year of age. SIDS deaths had been declining since 1995. Krista Ragan of the N.C. Child Fatality Task Force said of the change, "The number of SIDS deaths does fluctuate from year to year, but the State Child Fatality Prevention Team is examining the 2008 cases in an attempt to identify a possible reason for this increase, and we will work with other agencies and organizations to address the issue."

Many women in North Carolina are entering pregnancy with risk factors that affect their health and the health of their babies, according to health officials. In 2007, more than half of women of childbearing age (54%) were either overweight or obese, and 47 percent didn't get the physical activity they need. In addition, 24 percent smoked cigarettes, 10 percent had high blood pressure, 3 percent had diabetes, and 25 percent lacked health insurance.

The high rate of unplanned pregnancies in North Carolina (40%) also contributed to medical problems for both women and their infants.

To address these and other risk factors, partnerships among agencies such as the N.C. Division of Public Health, the non-profit N.C. Healthy Start Foundation, the March of Dimes, and the University of North Carolina Center for Maternal and Child Health are encouraging women to take advantage of opportunities to improve their health not only during, but also prior to and after pregnancy. The Division is also seeking to expand access to health care and family planning services for women of childbearing age. More information about these efforts can be found at www.mombaby.org. In addition, the N.C. Healthy Start Foundation provides bilingual information to women and families and the statewide, toll-free N.C. Family Health Resource Line (1-800-367-2229).

September is Infant Mortality Awareness month. Activities – including health fairs, newsletters, and radio and TV messages – are being planned in communities throughout the state and will be listed on the N.C. Healthy Start Foundation website, www.nchealthystart.org.

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NOTE: For a full set of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) data tables, see www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/deaths/ims/2008.