



Keeping Babies Healthy

Recently it was announced by the Governor's office that the infant mortality rates (the rates at which babies die before they turn one year old) are now the lowest in Michigan history – especially among the state's African American population. This is thanks to a coordinated effort on the part of volunteers and local and state agencies to fight the problem.



“The trend for the reduction of infant mortality in Michigan is encouraging,” says Berrien County Health Department's Fatimah Mitchell,

Raising-Up Healthy Babies Taskforce Coordinator. “However infant mortality among African American, Hispanic and Native American babies remains significantly higher than that of the white population. Additionally, the United States ranks 23rd among industrialized nations in babies dying before their first birthday.” This is unacceptable.

Infant mortality is the death of an infant before his or her first birthday. It is often described as a rate . . . deaths per 1,000 live births. Additionally, the infant mortality rate is often used as a measure of the general health of a community.

Berrien County Experience
Seven years ago, Berrien County was ranked the WORST county in the state of Michigan,

with infants born to black women dying at a rate of 22 deaths per 1,000 live births.

“As a result of these unacceptable rates, the *Raising Up Healthy Babies Taskforce* was formed,” said Mitchell. “The taskforce, coordinated by the Berrien County Health Department (with funding from the Michigan Department of Community Health), is made up of dedicated volunteers and agency representatives who are committed to reducing infant deaths.”

“Our numbers have gone down over the past couple of years, but much work still needs to be done to make sure healthy babies are born and live beyond the age of one year,” added the Mitchell. You can help by joining the task force.

Available Services to Prevent Infant Deaths

There are many programs that help to reduce the infant death rate. These programs include:

The Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) Program, which links BCHD registered nurses who make home visits with first-time mothers throughout pregnancy and for two years after birth.

Prenatal Care (including Maternal and Infant Health Program). Many of the babies who die are born too soon and too small. This program educates pregnant women about the signs and symptoms of pre-term labor and provides access to early prenatal care.

Baby's Own Bed (BOB), which provides portable cribs for low-income families who

otherwise would have no safe place for their infants to sleep.

Family Planning Many infants who die are conceived as the result of unintended pregnancies, so efforts are underway to prevent unplanned pregnancies through family planning and abstinence programs.



Breast-Feeding Assistance Peer Counselor. Breast-fed babies statistically do better than formula fed infants, so ef-

forts are underway to encourage new mothers to breast-feed their babies.

Inter-Conception Health Services. Babies born to women who get pregnant very quickly after having a child or wait many years between children are at greater risk for potentially serious delivery-related complications, including premature birth and low birth weight.

Safe-Sleep Education Many babies are dying when they are put to sleep in places that are not safe. This program teaches parents how to keep their baby safe while sleeping.

For information about any of these programs, please contact Fatimah Mitchell, Raising Up Healthy Babies, at **927-5663**.

Berrien County Health Department:

Preventing Disease, Prolonging Life and Protecting the Health of the



Cancer Prevention and Control

October is designated as Cancer Prevention and Control Month. Cancer is a devastating disease, and the Berrien County Health Department wants you to be informed about what you can do to prevent cancer and the resources that are available to detect and treat it early. For more information about cancer prevention and control, or any of the health topics presented in these articles, **please call the health department at 926-7121.**

Important Safe Sleep Tips:

1. Baby sleeps by him/herself in a crib, portable crib or bassinet.
2. Always put baby to sleep on his or her BACK even when he or she can roll over.
3. Nothing in sleep area. No pillows, blankets, comforters, stuffed animals, or other soft things.
4. Keep baby's face uncovered during sleep for easy breathing. Use a sleeper instead of a blanket.
5. Don't allow anyone to smoke anything around baby.
6. Don't overheat the baby. Dress the baby in as much or as little clothing as you wear.
7. Use a firm mattress with tightly fitted sheet.



For more information about infant mortality prevention programs, call the Health Department:

926-7121

Special thanks to Fatimah Mitchell for her assistance with writing this article.

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor		Niles		Three Oaks	
769 Pipestone	M-139 Office	School Based	1205 N. Front St.	21 N. Elm	
P.O. Box 706	2106 S. M-139	870 Colfax Ave	684-2800	756-2008	
926-7121	927-5623	925-4500			

Or visit us on the web at www.berriencohlthdept.org

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