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Contact: Office of Communications (614) 644-8562

Infant Deaths in Ohio Declined Slightly in 2013;
Despite Progress, Ohio’s Rate Remains Above National Average

New State Budget Contains Initiatives to Strengthen Efforts

COLUMBUS – The number of infant deaths in Ohio declined slightly from 1,047 in 2012 to 1,024 in 2013, although Ohio’s 2013 overall infant mortality rate still remains higher than the national average by 23 percent. The racial disparity in infant deaths was substantial, with black infants dying at more than twice the rate of white infants.

Infant mortality is defined nationwide as the death of a live-born baby before his or her first birthday. Infant mortality rate is calculated as the number of such deaths per 1,000 live births. It is commonly expressed in three ways – overall infant mortality rate, white infant mortality rate and black infant mortality rate.

The three leading causes of infant deaths in Ohio are prematurity/pre-term births, sleep-related deaths and birth defects.

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) has released the most recently available (2013) infant mortality data. 2014 infant mortality data will be released in the fall.

Ohio Infant Mortality Rate (Number of Infant Deaths per 1,000 Live Births)

| | <u>2013</u> | <u>2012</u> |
|----------|-------------|-------------|
| Overall: | 7.4 | 7.6 |
| White: | 6.0 | 6.4 |
| Black: | 13.8 | 13.9 |

“We are making progress, but we all must do even more to save babies’ lives,” said ODH Director Rick Hodges. “Much has been done over the last two years and we are waiting for that data to be measured. In particular, we must do more to address the racial disparity in infant mortality, and we are doing so through our support of the Ohio Institute for Equity in Birth Outcomes.”

The Ohio Institute for Equity in Birth Outcomes is a partnership between ODH and CityMatCH, a national organization that supports urban maternal and child health initiatives at the local level. The partnership includes nine Ohio metropolitan communities that account for 95 percent of the state’s black infant deaths, and 49 percent of its white infant deaths. These communities are Butler County; Canton/Stark County; Cincinnati; Columbus; Cleveland/Cuyahoga County; Youngstown/Mahoning County; Dayton/Montgomery County; Akron/Summit County; Toledo/Lucas County.

Ohio’s new two-year state budget contains several initiatives that significantly target infant mortality by focusing resources where the need is greatest, including by creating a process to identify communities with the highest rates of infant mortality in order to prioritize and surge resources into those areas;

(MORE)

supporting enhanced care management for women in high-risk neighborhoods and engaging leaders in those neighborhoods to connect women to care; using evidence-based tobacco cessation tools for pregnant women in areas with high infant mortality rates since smoking is linked to poor birth outcomes; and continuing support for existing ODH-funded initiatives like the Ohio Institute for Equity in Birth Outcomes and a “safe sleep” campaign to raise public awareness about infant safe sleep practices since about 15 percent of infant deaths are sleep-related.

Ohio has launched many infant mortality initiatives over the past three years whose impact is not reflected in the 2013 infant mortality data.

Key 2013 initiatives: ODH partnered with a national organization that supports urban maternal and child health initiatives at the local level to launch the Ohio Institute for Equity in Birth Outcomes. The partnership includes nine Ohio metropolitan communities to improve overall birth outcomes and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in infant mortality; the 2012-13 state budget provided temporary Medicaid coverage enabling pregnant women to receive medical care while their Medicaid application is processed, accelerating quicker access to care for better birth outcomes; the Progesterone Quality Improvement Project was launched to improve birth outcomes for Medicaid recipients by encouraging wider use of progesterone treatment to reduce prematurity/pre-term births; the 2014-15 state budget included funding to connect women through their prenatal care provider to the tools, training and assistance needed to quit smoking; ODH launched a public awareness campaign about infant safe sleep practices; Gov. Kasich signed legislation into law requiring hospitals and freestanding birthing centers to screen all newborns for the early diagnosis and treatment of Critical Congenital Heart Disease, a group of heart defects which account for 5 percent of Ohio infant deaths.

Key 2014 initiatives: Healthcare benefits were extended to more low-income Ohioans, providing additional low-income pregnant women with better access to medical care which is associated with better birth outcomes; Ohio Institute for Equity in Birth Outcomes teams reviewed local data and used it to identify evidence-based interventions to address highest risk populations in targeted areas. The teams were trained to conduct fetal infant mortality reviews, a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency, community-based process that identifies local infant mortality issues through the review of fetal and infant deaths and develops recommendations and initiatives to reduce them; ODH and the Ohio Collaborative to Prevent Infant Mortality hosted the second biannual statewide Infant Mortality Summit with more than 1,700 attendees. Governor Kasich announced new initiatives to focus support and resources for mothers and babies most at-risk; ODH sponsored the Ohio Sudden Infant Death Network’s “Safe Sleep Community Forums” around the state.

Key 2015 initiatives: Ohio Institute for Equity in Birth Outcomes teams are launching evidence-based interventions to address highest risk populations in targeted areas; in partnership with the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers, ODH has launched the “Centering Pregnancy” demonstration project, an evidence-based healthcare delivery model which integrates maternal care, education and support to improve birth and infant health outcomes in high-risk communities; the new two-year state budget includes numerous provisions to reduce infant mortality.

ODH’s report on Ohio’s 2013 infant mortality data is available [here](#) and on its website at “odh.ohio.gov” and select “Infant Mortality Data” from the A-Z Index. The report includes infant mortality data by county, and a more detailed summary and chronology of Ohio initiatives to address infant mortality. A visual timeline of key initiatives is available [here](#) and on ODH’s website.

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