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Total Ohio Infant Deaths Rise in 2016 **While Sleep-Related Deaths Decline**

New state budget dedicates nearly \$50 million to help save babies' lives

COLUMBUS – The number of Ohio infants who died before their first birthday increased from 1,005 in 2015 to 1,024 in 2016, according to a new report released by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). The report also contains some promising news with fewer sleep-related infant deaths than in 2015. Sleep-related infant deaths have been trending downward over time, corresponding with intensive state and local initiatives to promote safe sleep practices.

“While we have seen some progress in preventing sleep-related infant deaths, we still have a lot of work to do, particularly in the areas of premature births and racial disparities. That is why the state is investing millions of dollars in local initiatives that will help more Ohio babies reach their first birthdays, particularly in high-risk communities and populations,” said ODH Director Lance Himes.

Ohio’s focus on preventing sleep-related infant deaths through public awareness campaigns and programs to provide free cribs to eligible parents is making some headway. In 2016, there were 22 percent fewer sleep-related infant deaths than in 2015.

Prematurity-related conditions, such as preterm birth before 37 weeks of pregnancy, are the leading cause of infant deaths in Ohio. Although the number of prematurity-related infant deaths increased from 2015 to 2016, Ohio’s prematurity infant mortality rate – the number of preterm infant deaths per 1,000 live births – has not changed significantly in the past decade.

Ohio is addressing many of the contributing factors related to premature births such as smoking, and identifying and treating women at risk of developing diabetes and high blood pressure during pregnancy, conditions which increase the risk of having a preterm or low-birth-weight baby. One of the more successful interventions is the use of a hormone medication, progesterone, in at-risk women to help reduce the likelihood of preterm birth.

The current state budget dedicates nearly \$50 million to improving birth outcomes and reducing racial and ethnic disparities, and builds on almost \$87 million in investments made during the past six years.

The majority of state funding is dedicated to supporting local community-driven proposals to combat infant mortality in high-risk areas.

Nine metropolitan areas accounted for 59 percent of all infant deaths, and 86 percent of African-American infant deaths, in Ohio in 2016: Butler Co., Cleveland/Cuyahoga Co., Columbus/Franklin Co., Cincinnati/Hamilton Co., Toledo/Lucas Co., Youngstown/Mahoning Co., Dayton/Montgomery Co., Canton/Stark Co., and Akron/Summit Co. In these communities, local infant mortality coalitions are pursuing promising practices to reduce infant mortality supported by state and federal funding.

During the next two years, additional community-based pilot programs with proven track records in reducing infant mortality will be launched, and the evidence-based CenteringPregnancy® group prenatal care model will be expanded.

Ohio also will leverage federal grants to support local infant mortality initiatives during the next year:

- To assist 27 Ohio counties at risk for poor birth or childhood developmental outcomes to expand local voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services to women during pregnancy, and to parents with young children.
- To assist 14 Ohio counties with the highest infant mortality rates for African-American babies to promote healthy pregnancies, positive birth outcomes, and healthy infant growth and development.

Ohio's goal is to reach the national objective of a 6.0 infant mortality rate or lower in every race and ethnicity group. An infant mortality rate is calculated as the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births. Ohio's overall (all races) infant mortality rate increased from 7.2 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015 to 7.4 in 2016. The white infant mortality rate increased from 5.5 to 5.8, and the black infant mortality rate increased from 15.1 to 15.2, with black babies dying at nearly three times the rate as white babies. However, Ohio's infant mortality rates are trending downward over time.

The complete 2016 Ohio Infant Mortality Report including data by county, a list of new initiatives to address infant mortality, and a summary of initiatives over the past six years is available [here](#). Ohio's infant mortality website contains infant mortality tools, resources and information at www.PreventInfantMortality.ohio.gov.

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