

Alabama's infant mortality rate reaches all-time low in 2002

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CONTACT: Albert Woolbright, Ph.D.
(334) 206-5429
awoolbright@adph.state.al.us

The Alabama Department of Public Health announces that the infant mortality rate of 9.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2002 was the lowest ever recorded, as were the 538 infant deaths. The infant mortality rate in 2001 was 9.4. Twenty-nine fewer Alabama infants died before their first birthdays in 2002 than in 2001.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "We are encouraged by the significant progress made in lowering our infant death rate and in reducing the number of teens having children. Alabamians should be proud of the efforts made to address our traditionally high infant mortality rate."

The infant mortality rate for black infants (14.0 per 1,000 live births) was very close to the national rate for blacks, but the white rate of 7.0 continues to be above the national average.

The infant mortality rate was higher for infants of teen mothers (12.0) than adult mothers (8.6), for mothers who smoked (10.8) than for mothers who did not smoke (8.8), and for mothers with less than adequate prenatal care (13.1) than for mothers with adequate prenatal care (7.7). Low weight babies (those born at less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces) had an infant mortality rate of 63.0 per 1,000 live births, which was 21 times higher than the 3.0 rate for normal birthweight infants.

Among the programs that have had a positive effect in helping reduce infant mortality are the following:

- The WIC program which provides nutrition education and nutritious food to low income mothers and children,
- Plan *first*, which helps low income women plan their pregnancies,
- Tobacco prevention programs,
- Teen pregnancy and unwed pregnancy prevention programs,
- Programs to encourage mothers to put their infants to sleep on their backs to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS),
- Programs to encourage women of childbearing age to take folic acid to prevent birth defects,
- Programs designed to reduce infant mortality and promote perinatal health, such as the Nurse Family Partnership and perinatal nurse coordinators at regional referral hospitals.

Teen births declined from 8,993 in 2001 to 8,589 in 2002. This was also the lowest number of births to teenagers in Alabama ever recorded. In 1960, teens bore 15,608 infants. The percent of births to teens, 14.6 in 2002, was also the lowest on record.

"We must remain committed to initiatives that have reduced our state's infant mortality rate," Dr. Williamson said. "To help ensure healthy babies, women should receive good prenatal care, including eating nutritious food, and not smoking, using alcohol or illegal drugs."

Sumter County had the state's highest infant mortality rate in 2002 at 27.2 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. The following counties had no infant deaths in 2002: Bibb, Bullock, Clay, Coosa, Geneva, Henry and Lawrence.

Graphs and detailed charts including the total resident infant deaths and infant mortality rates by county are available at the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at www.adph.org.

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