



State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services

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More babies born in N.C. in 2007; infant death rate rises 5 percent

RALEIGH — More babies were born to North Carolina residents last year than ever before — 130,886 births were recorded for 2007. The state's infant mortality rate was 8.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2007, a five percent increase over the 2006 rate of 8.1, the lowest rate in the state's history.

Of the 130,886 live births last year, 72,359 (55.3 percent) were white non-Hispanic; 30,575 (23.4 percent) were black non-Hispanic; 1,757 (1.3 percent) were American Indian non-Hispanic; 22,104 (16.9 percent) were Hispanic; and 4,091 births (3.1 percent) were among other races/ethnicities.

Racial disparities in infant mortality continued; the minority rate is still more than double the white rate. The minority infant mortality rate was 13.9 infant deaths for every 1,000 live births in 2007, an increase of 2.2 percent over the 2006 all-time low rate of 13.6. The 2007 white infant mortality rate was 6.3, up 5.0 percent from its 2006 rate of 6.0.

Over the three-year period 2005-2007, black non-Hispanics have experienced the highest average infant mortality rate, 15.0 deaths per 1,000 live births, followed by American Indian non-Hispanics (12.3), Hispanics (6.3), and white non-Hispanics (6.2). Other non-Hispanic minorities, as a group, had the lowest overall infant mortality rate (5.9) during that time.

In 2007, prematurity and low birth weight accounted for 18.6 percent of deaths of infants under 1 year old, and for 27.3 percent of the neonatal deaths (infants under 28 days old). Birth defects were the cause of 18.2 percent of the deaths, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), accounted for 8.9 percent. Other causes of death included respiratory problems and other medical conditions, diseases, infections and accidents. Homicide or assault were blamed for 1.1 percent of the deaths.

"Many women of childbearing age in North Carolina are entering pregnancy with risk factors that affect their health as well as the health of their baby," said State Health Director Leah Devlin. "One-fourth of North Carolina women in this age group are obese, almost half don't get the physical activity they need, and another one-fourth use tobacco.

"Some women are also affected by high blood pressure, diabetes, mental health issues, or misuse of alcohol or drugs," Devlin said.

"African American women in North Carolina are disproportionately affected by poor health, lack of health insurance, and high rates of poverty," Devlin added.

"Unfortunately, one out of four of women of childbearing age in North Carolina does not have health insurance, making access to health care difficult at this important time in their lives," she said. "Without continued care, women who have chronic health problems may not be able to stay healthy. That's not good for their babies, either, and can put their future pregnancies at risk," Devlin said.

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“If North Carolina is to reduce infant mortality, we must improve the health and well-being of all women of reproductive age,” she emphasized.

The Division of Public Health and N.C. Healthy Start Foundation, in partnership with a number of organizations including the March of Dimes, 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.

September is Infant Mortality Awareness Month. Among activities planned to bring attention to this important issue is “Families Focused, Families Empowered...A Healthy Baby Begins With You” on Saturday, Sept. 20, at Halifax Community College in Weldon, which will give area families an opportunity to learn more about the resources in their community, with a specific focus on family wellness.

Overall, infant mortality rates have improved dramatically over the past 30 years in North Carolina, declining 48.8 percent since 1978, when 16.6 out of 1,000 babies died. The rate reached an all-time low of 8.1 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2007. However, North Carolina still has one of the nation’s higher infant mortality rates. Based on provisional 2004 and 2005 data, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has ranked the state 44th in infant mortality.

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NOTE TO REPORTERS:

Selected state and county data tables, IMR graph, and N.C. Perinatal Care Region (PCR) map attached. For a full set of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) data tables, see www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/deaths/ims/2007.

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