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TENNESSEE SEES FEWER INFANT DEATHS IN 2018

Infant Mortality Data Dashboard Now Available

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee Department of Health is celebrating the lowest infant mortality rate in the state in three years. TDH data show there were 38 fewer infant deaths in the state in 2018 than in 2017. Infant mortality is defined as the death of a child before his or her first birthday, and is a critical indicator of the overall health of the state.

“We’re encouraged by this progress in reducing infant mortality in Tennessee and recognize the important work across sectors that is addressing root causes of infant deaths,” said Tennessee Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey, MD, MBA, FAAP. “Thirty-eight fewer infant deaths in 2018 will mean that two additional classrooms of Kindergarteners will have the chance to grow up in our great state.”

Tennessee’s infant mortality rate fell to 6.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2018 from a rate of 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2017 and 2016. Although the rate of infant deaths is declining in Tennessee, statistics show the need for enhanced efforts to improve birth outcomes. The state’s current infant mortality rate still exceeds the national rate of 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births, and the rate of death of black infants continues to be nearly twice that of white infants.

“Many factors contribute to a healthy birth and first year of life, including good health before a woman ever gets pregnant, early prenatal care, avoidance of tobacco and high-quality care during labor and delivery,” said TDH Deputy Commissioner for Population Health Morgan McDonald, MD, FACP, FAAP. “Immunizations, breastfeeding and other preventive care and safe practices for the baby such as using proper car seats and placing the baby to sleep alone on her back in a crib all help create an environment of health for the child.”

TDH has created a data dashboard to allow community partners to access infant mortality data for their region. The dashboard assists partners in implementing prevention activities based on the most common causes of infant death in their area. The dashboard can be accessed at https://data.tn.gov/t/Public/views/ChildFatalityDashboard/MainDashboard?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3Atabs=no&%3Atoolbar=no.

Safe Sleep Saves Lives

Approximately 20 percent of infant deaths in Tennessee each year are due to unsafe sleeping conditions. Several hospitals and community agencies are educating parents and caregivers about safe sleep using TDH educational materials.

“We’re fortunate to have such strong partnerships with Tennessee hospitals and community agencies to promote safe sleep so families have the correct information,” said TDH Injury

Prevention and Detection Director Rachel Heitmann, MS. "In addition to hospitals we have partnered with several housing authorities, churches, senior centers and other community organizations to educate parents and other caregivers about safe sleep for infants."

Safe sleep practices can prevent SIDS and other sleep-related deaths of babies. The Tennessee Department of Health promotes the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations that infants should:

- Always be placed on their backs to sleep
- Sleep alone in a crib or bassinet, which can be in the same room as an adult caregiver
- Not have bumper pads, blankets, stuffed animals, toys or pets in their cribs
- Sleep on a firm crib mattress with the mattress covered only by a fitted sheet

Learn more about safe sleep and order free TDH educational materials at <http://safesleep.tn.gov>.

Partnering for Prevention

While no single solution will prevent all infant deaths, TDH has partnered with hospitals and community organizations to reduce the risks of infant deaths through promotion of safe sleep practices, preconception health and prenatal care and reduction of early elective deliveries. TDH has joined the Tennessee Hospital Association to create the [BEST for Tennessee Babies award](#). The BEST award is presented to hospitals annually to recognize their meeting criteria around breastfeeding, reducing early elective deliveries and safe sleep.

TDH has worked with March of Dimes to implement the supportive pregnancy care group prenatal care model. TDH also works with providers and families to provide contraception when desired and plan pregnancies at healthy intervals for mothers and babies, as unintended pregnancies can sometimes have negative consequences including birth defects and low birth weight.

Learn more about TDH programs and services for maternal and child health at www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/mch.html.

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Health is to protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of people in Tennessee. Learn more about TDH services and programs at www.tn.gov/health.

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This news release can be accessed online at www.tn.gov/health/news.html.

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