



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Infant mortality rate in Alabama falls to an all-time low in 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health announces that the infant mortality rate of 8.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2011 is the lowest ever recorded in the state. This represents 481 infants, the lowest number ever – which died before reaching 1 year of age.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, “Historically, Alabama’s infant mortality rate has been among the highest in the nation and we must continue to address this challenging public health issue. Positive trends we are seeing include fewer teenage pregnancies and less smoking among pregnant women, and we hope to sustain these improvements in the coming years.”

"Lowering Alabama's infant mortality rate is a critical part of our efforts to improve public health in Alabama," Gov. Robert Bentley said. "We are encouraged by news that our rate is the lowest it has ever been, and we will work to continue our progress."

Several other indicators of record progress are found in this year’s statistics, especially with regard to teen births. The percent of births to teenagers in 2011 was 11.3 (6,697), the lowest ever recorded. Another record low was the percent of births to young teens, defined as less than 18 years old, which fell to 3.5 percent of live births, (2,076 births).

The percentage of teenage mothers who smoked (10.8) and the percent of older mothers who smoked (10.6) are the lowest in the past decade. Mothers who smoke have a 20 percent higher infant mortality rate than do nonsmoking mothers.

Accompanying the decrease in teen births has been a decline in the number of teen abortions from 1,644 in 2009, to 1,466 in 2010, and 1,318 in 2011.

A number of risk factors affect birth outcomes. Abstinence and family planning allow for delayed childbirth including appropriate spacing between births. Infant mortality was higher for mothers with birth intervals less than two years (8.5) versus those with a two-or-more-year interval (6.8) between births.

Reducing the number of preterm births can reduce costs for neonatal intensive care. Low birth weight infants, defined as those weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces, are about 20 times more likely to die than infants of normal weight.

The percent of mothers with adequate prenatal care was similar for both blacks and whites in 2011. While 73.0 percent of all white women had adequate care, 69.4 percent of black women had adequate care. Over the past 12 years the percentage of mothers whose deliveries are paid for by Medicaid has grown from 45 to 53 percent.

Despite progress that marks the lowest infant mortality rates ever recorded among both black and white mothers in Alabama, disparities remain in pregnancy outcomes.

- The 2011 infant mortality rate for black infants of 13.0 per 1,000 live births was above the 2010 national rate for blacks of 11.6.
- Alabama's 2011 white infant mortality rate of 6.1 continues to be above the national rate of 5.2 for whites in 2010.

“To sustain our advances, we are considering strategies such as initiatives to reduce the number of preterm births,” Dr. Williamson said. “We also need to limit elective deliveries when gestation is less than 39 weeks.”

The counties with the lowest three-year infant mortality rates, 2009-2011, were Lamar, 2.3; Choctaw, 2.7; and Henry, 3.5. The highest counties were Coosa, 18.1; Bibb, 13.8; Greene, 13.8; and Tallapoosa, 13.8.

Graphs and detailed charts are available at the Alabama Department of Public Health website at www.adph.org/healthstats.