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INFANT MORTALITY RATES DROP SUBSTANTIALLY IN COUNTY

African American Infant Mortality Decreases 25% over Three-Year Period

YPSILANTI, Mich., September 28, 2007—Data released by the Michigan Department of Community Health this week show that infant mortality rates decreased substantially across Washtenaw County during 2006. The overall infant death rate declined 8 percent to 5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births during 2006 from an average of 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births during 2005. Statewide, the overall infant death rate declined 6 percent to 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2006 from 7.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2005.

The drop in the African American infant death rate in Washtenaw County was even more pronounced, declining 25 percent to an average of 12.1 deaths per 1,000 live births during the 2004-2006 reporting period from an average of 16.1 deaths per 1,000 live births during 2003-2005. Statewide, the overall African American infant death rate declined 5 percent to 16.6 deaths per 1,000 live births during 2004-2006 from 17.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in the 2003-2005 time period.

“We’re pleased at the progress the County has made in reducing infant mortality—particularly African American infant mortality—but we still recognize there’s much work left to be done,” said Susan Lee, Director of Nursing for the Washtenaw County Public Health Department. “In spite of the progress we’re making, African American infants still die at three times the rate of white infants—and that racial disparity is simply unacceptable in our eyes,” she said.

“These results underscore how vitally important it is to have and retain resources like the Healthy Michigan Fund, which finances the work of the Washtenaw County Coalition for Infant Mortality Reduction,” said Ellen Clement, Washtenaw County Health Officer. “One death is too high a price to pay for not continuing the important work of this coalition, whose efforts have produced these excellent results.”

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Ruth Kraut, Consultant Facilitator for the Washtenaw County Coalition for Infant Mortality Reduction, said her coalition works to build awareness with health service delivery professionals and the community about the best ways to prevent infant mortality.

“Our coalition is heavily involved in keeping the community focused on planning their pregnancies, practicing safer-sleep techniques and preventing premature births—the three biggest reasons for infant mortality. At the same time we also concentrate on identifying and addressing the causes behind racial disparities in infant deaths,” Kraut said. “The Michigan Department of Community Health data indicate we’re moving in the right direction, but only if we can sustain the progress we’ve achieved in reducing the number of infants who die in Washtenaw County.”

Washtenaw County Coalition for Infant Mortality Reduction

The Washtenaw County Coalition for Infant Mortality Reduction (CIMR) is one of 11 health departments in Michigan granted funding from the Michigan Department of Community Health to work to reduce infant mortality, paying particular attention to racial disparities. Members of the Washtenaw County CIMR include health care providers from local birthing hospitals, faculty and staff from educational institutions (including universities as well as local school districts), visiting nurses, community organizations interested in health disparities, leaders in faith-based organizations, public health officials and maternal and infant health service delivery professionals.

Infant Death Findings and Tips for Safer Sleep

Findings from a study of 253 infant deaths in 2002 and 2003 by the Michigan Child Death State Advisory Team included the following:

- 84 percent of these infants were not sleeping in cribs.
- 48 percent were in soft or heavy bedding.
- 52 percent were sharing their sleeping space with one or more persons.
- When looking at SIDS deaths (105 of the 253 deaths studied), only 32 percent of the infants were sleeping on their backs.

State health officials estimate that one child dies every week in Michigan due to unsafe sleep practices. Help infants sleep safer by following these tips:

- Babies should sleep alone in a safety-approved crib with a firm mattress and tightly fitted sheets.
- Babies should sleep on their backs even when they can roll over.
- Babies should be kept warm using sleep clothing rather than blankets.
- Babies must sleep in a smoke-free environment.

For more information and resources, please visit:

Washtenaw County Coalition for Infant Mortality Reduction

http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public_health/cimr/cimr.html

Safer Sleep Practices

http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public_health/cimr/safe_sleep.html

Parents' Guide to Safe Sleep

<http://www.washtenawchildren.org/programs/documents/SIDSparentsafesleep.pdf>

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