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INFANT MORTALITY CAN MEASURE THE HEALTH OF A COMMUNITY

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St. Lucie County, FL - Infant mortality and low birthweight are serious issues affecting our nation's health. September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month, a time to reflect on the tragic losses that too many families have suffered. Infant Mortality refers to the loss of a baby before their first birthday. Infant Mortality rates (IMR) are sensitive indicators of the health of communities, states and countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the worldwide IMR has decreased from 64.8 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 30.5/1000 in 2016, with a 6 times higher rate in the WHO African region than in the WHO European region. While a downward trend is certainly welcomed, the wide discrepancy between regions indicates the necessity of sustained interventions focused on areas where rates are higher.

There are issues and concerns to be addressed with the Infant Mortality Rate that exist in St. Lucie County (SLC). Black/African American (AA) families experience higher rates of infant mortality than white families. In 2016, the IMR for AA families in St. Lucie County was 9.8/1000 and for white families 3.5/1000. Although, overall the IMR in SLC improved in 2017, the disparity only slightly decreased in 2017 (7.3/1000 in Black families and 2.0/1000 in Caucasian families). The Department of Health in St. Lucie (DOH-St. Lucie) is working to reduce the racial disparities as it relates to infant mortality.

"In St. Lucie, a Fetal Infant Mortality Review Coordinator was hired 2 years ago, thanks to funding through the Common Good Initiative from Allegany Franciscan Ministries. Specifically, to review the infant death cases and determine any related causation and propose specific prevention strategies. Since this review, the Direct On Scene Education (DOSE) program was initiated. DOH-St. Lucie partnered with St. Lucie County Fire Rescue to train their first responders in providing infant safe sleep education when they respond to non-emergent calls. If there is an infant less than one year or a pregnant female in the home, safe sleep education is provided and referrals are made to obtain a safe sleep environment if needed for baby. As a community, if we work together and bring awareness to the lives lost, we will become stronger to keep our babies healthier and thriving, thus making our communities healthier and stronger", said Clint Sperber, County Health Officer for the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie.

Additional initiatives provided this year with the goal of reducing infant mortality:

- ❖ *Breastfeeding trainings were provided by world renowned expert in breastfeeding medicine, pediatrician Dr. Jack Newman. The three hospitals on the Treasure Coast – Tradition Medical Center, Lawnwood Regional Medical Center & Heart Institute and St. Lucie Medical Center served as host for the trainings.*

- ❖ *The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative is underway at the 3 Treasure Coast Hospitals.*
- ❖ *Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Investigation training provided for law enforcement.*
- ❖ *HIV Perinatal Symposium.*

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