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## SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL INFANT MORTALITY AWARENESS MONTH

*St. Lucie County's Infant Mortality Rate Continues to Decline*



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**St. Lucie County, FL** - September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month and the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County is encouraging everyone to get involved to continue to help reduce the number of infants that die each year. Infant mortality is defined as death occurring during the first year of life.

In 2014, the FDOH-SLC, noticed black infants were dying at a higher rate than white infants. To address this disparity in infant mortality rates (IMR), FDOH-SLC wrote a grant and secured two years of funding from Allegany Franciscan Ministries to complete a Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR). FIMR is a national program whose goal is to enhance the health and well-being of women, infants and families by improving the community resources and the delivery of services available to them. During these two years, infant death cases were reviewed from 2014 to 2018. Twenty-six cases were chosen for review; most from the Lincoln Park area. The Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) established a Case Review Team (CRT), which examined circumstances surrounding the infant deaths to identify system gaps and made recommendations. Then the Community Action Team (CAT) took those recommendations to make the changes needed in the community's service delivery system.

"As a result of the FIMR, we are encouraged by the improvement of the infant mortality rate (IMR). The IMR is the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births. St. Lucie County's Infant Mortality Rate declined for the fourth year in a row since 2014 when the rate was 6.1 infant deaths per 1000 births. The IMR for St. Lucie County in 2018 was 3.8 infant deaths per 1000 live births, a decline of 37.7. The most significant improvement was in St. Lucie's Black population where the infant death rate declined by 70.7% during the same time period, from 18.5 deaths per 1000 births in 2014 to 5.5 deaths per 1000 births in 2018. Even with the improvement in the IMR, premature birth continues to be a leading cause of infant mortality and morbidity (sickness) in St. Lucie County. Premature birth is defined as a birth occurring before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy," said Clint Sperber, County Health Officer for the Florida Department of Health in St. Lucie County.

The final recommendations from the FIMR project were:

- To address infant safe sleep
- To improve prenatal care
- To improve community education

Two new projects that are starting soon are the DOSE program (Direct On Scene Education) and a community-based doula & CLC (Certified Lactation Counsellor) program. The DOSE program is a partnership between the St. Lucie Fire District and the Florida Department of

Health in St. Lucie County to reduce the number of infant deaths due to unsafe sleep. The community-based doula program, funded by the Children’s Services Council of St. Lucie County, offers birth doula services to women at higher risk for poor pregnancy & birth outcomes. The community based CLC program will provide up to 6 months of breastfeeding support.

The decline in St. Lucie County’s infant mortality rate (IMR) is accredited to the work and collaborative efforts provided by numerous health and human service agencies, local prenatal care providers, hospitals and funders:

Healthy Start Coalition of SLC	Children’s Services Council of SLC
Allegany Franciscan Ministries	St. Lucie County Fire District
Lawnwood Regional Medical Center & Heart Institute	Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System
St. Lucie Medical Center	Cleveland Clinic Martin Health
Florida Department of Health in SLC	Florida Community Health Centers
Department of Children & Families	In The Image of Christ, Inc.
WIC	DONA
FSU College of Medicine	Early Learning Coalition of SLC
Pre-Birth Centers of America	Kids Place Pediatrics
Fort Pierce Housing Authority	Helping People Succeed
Indian River State College	Roundtable of St. Lucie County
Birth Blossoms, Inc.	Easter Seals
Families of the Treasure Coast	Healthy Start Coalition of IRC
Advanced Care Pediatrics	AMAG Pharmaceuticals
PATCHES	Natera
Kids and Nurses PPEC Center	

Factors that may contribute to premature birth are a short time period between pregnancies, smoking, obesity, and high stress. Premature birth may result in the baby having problems with breathing, infections, and often leading to admission to the neonatal intensive care unit. In an effort to increase awareness, we urge the community to assist us in helping to bring light to this issue by recognizing September as Infant Mortality Awareness Month. Policymakers, health care providers, community leaders, parents, grandparents, neighbors, clergy, and others can be involved in ways to help all babies born in St. Lucie County get the best possible start in life.

***Steps that can be taken include:***

- ✓ Encouraging and supporting a woman’s healthy choices
- ✓ Planning for pregnancy and being healthy before and between pregnancies, including being at a healthy weight
- ✓ Taking 400 mcg of folic acid daily to help reduce chances of having a baby with birth defects
- ✓ Quitting smoking and providing a smoke-free environment for baby
- ✓ Getting tested and treated, if needed, for sexually transmitted diseases
- ✓ Having a full-term pregnancy (about 40 weeks)
- ✓ Knowing the signs and getting help for postpartum depression

- ✓ Placing baby on his or her back to sleep
- ✓ Making sure the baby sleeps in his or her own crib or bassinet, instead of your bed
- ✓ Breastfeeding baby and supporting a woman's choice to breastfeed
- ✓ Keeping your cool when baby will not stop crying and never shaking a baby
- ✓ Watching baby at all times and never leaving a baby unattended

To learn more about what steps YOU can take to help ensure the health and safety of St. Lucie County's babies, and to download relevant information, visit: [www.floridahealth.gov](http://www.floridahealth.gov) or [www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MaternalInfantHealth](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MaternalInfantHealth). To obtain resource information with health tips, helpful websites and telephone numbers, go to: [www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy](http://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy) [www.ounce.org](http://www.ounce.org) | or call the Breastfeeding Helpline: 1-800-994-9662.

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