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Ohio Infant Deaths Drop in 2018 for Second Consecutive Year; **Black Infant Mortality Declines but Disparity Continues to Persist**

Proven home visiting services being expanded to help reduce infant mortality

COLUMBUS – The number of Ohio infants who died before their first birthdays dropped to 938 in 2018 from 982 in 2017, marking a second straight year of decline, according to a new report released by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). The number of black infant deaths declined almost 12% from 2017 to 2018, the first year-to-year decline in five years. However, disparities continued to persist with black infants dying at more than two-and-a-half times the rate of white infants.

The infant mortality rate, defined as the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births, fell to 6.9 in 2018 from 7.2 in 2017 for all races overall. The rate among black infants fell to 13.9 in 2018 from 15.6 in 2017. The Ohio and national goal is 6.0 or fewer infant deaths per 1,000 live births in every racial and ethnic group.

“While there are indications of promising progress, there is much more that we must do to help more Ohio babies reach their first birthdays, particularly African-American infants given that the black infant mortality rate hasn’t changed significantly since 2009,” said Ohio Governor Mike DeWine. “One of my first acts as governor was to create the Governor’s Children’s Initiative to help Ohio’s babies and children grow and thrive in all of our communities.”

Governor DeWine formed the Governor’s Advisory Committee on Home Visitation to explore ways to increase access to proven home visiting services. Home visiting services are voluntary programs that serve pregnant women, new mothers, and children up to age three in their own homes. Home visiting services can help reduce infant mortality, improve school-readiness, and give parents the skills they need to help their children be healthy, happy, and ready to learn.

Governor DeWine also championed increasing funding for Ohio’s home visiting programs in the 2020-2021 state budget, investing an additional \$30 million over the biennium and bringing total state funding for home visiting to \$70 million over two years.

“We can help more Ohio babies reach their first birthdays by addressing infant mortality risk factors like the health of the mother before pregnancy, pre-term birth, access to prenatal care, and safe sleep practices,” said ODH Director Amy Acton, MD, MPH. “Although there were fewer prematurity-related infant deaths in 2018, prematurity-related conditions remained the leading cause of infant death in Ohio, comprising almost one-third of deaths.”

The leading causes of infant deaths in Ohio in 2018 were:

- Prematurity-related conditions including pre-term birth, respiratory distress, and low birth weight (29%)
- Birth defects (21%)
- External injury (10%)
- Sudden infant death syndrome (8%)
- Obstetric conditions (6%)

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Other key highlights of the 2018 Ohio Infant Mortality Report include:

- Prematurity-related infant deaths declined from 314 in 2017 to 269 in 2018
- Infant deaths caused by external injuries increased from 79 in 2017 to 95 in 2018
 - Ohio’s infant mortality rate for external injuries significantly increased from 2016 to 2018, with 0.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016, to 0.6 in 2017, and 0.7 in 2018
- Out of 140 sleep-related infant deaths reviewed through the Ohio Child Fatality Review process, black infants comprised half (54%) of deaths despite only representing 18% of live births
- According to the ABCs of safe sleep practices, babies sleep safest alone, on their back, in a crib. Most sleep-related deaths are found to be preventable. In over 70% of the cases reviewed, babies were not sleeping alone or in a crib or bassinet.

Nine Ohio counties and metropolitan areas accounted for close to two-thirds of all infant deaths, and 90 percent of black infant deaths, in Ohio in 2018: Butler Co., Cleveland/Cuyahoga Co., Columbus/Franklin Co., Cincinnati/Hamilton Co., Toledo/Lucas Co., Youngstown/Mahoning Co., Dayton/Montgomery Co., Canton/Stark Co., and Akron/Summit Co.

In all nine communities, local teams are pursuing evidence-based strategies and promising practices to reduce infant mortality and address racial disparities in birth outcomes supported by state and federal funding. These teams are using “neighborhood navigators” to identify pregnant women in their community who may be at risk for a poor birth outcome and connect them with needed healthcare, social and other services in order to have a healthy pregnancy and deliver a healthy baby.

In addition, maternal and infant health, including infant mortality and racial disparities in birth outcomes, are key health priorities in the state health improvement plan developed by ODH with state and local partners.

The complete 2018 Ohio Infant Mortality Report, including data by county, is available [here](#).

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