

News Release

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Utah's Infant Mortality Rate Drops to an All-Time Low

(Salt Lake City, UT) - The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today announced that Utah's 1999 Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has dropped to an all-time low of 4.8 deaths per 1,000 births. This is the first time in Utah history that the rate has fallen below 5.0. This rate brings Utah the title of the fifth lowest IMR (provisional 1999 data) in the United States.

"This rate is exciting, but more exciting is the fact that in 1999 alone more than 200 babies were saved. Since Utah has one of the highest birth rates in the nation (21.7 UT/14.6 U.S., 1998) this is a truly significant achievement," says Scott Williams, M.D., Deputy Director, UDOH.

The biggest age range for change was in infants 28 days to one year old (post neonatal); overall post neonatal deaths declined 54 percent. The sharp decline in post neonatal mortality reflects the tremendous decrease in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) deaths. SIDS deaths decreased about 80 percent with the inception of better education and the Back To Sleep message which has been widely disseminated through the media and health care providers and encourages parents and care givers to place the baby on his/her back to sleep. The next largest change was in the neonatal phase (first month of life) wherein deaths declined 36 percent.

In 1985, the IMR was 9.6 deaths per 1,000 births. In 1987 the Utah State Legislature appropriated nearly \$1.7 million to the Prenatal Initiative based on the 1985 IMR. The

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appropriation was designed to reduce infant (birth to age one) mortality and morbidity through providing public information about the importance of prenatal care and to fund the provision of high-quality, accessible maternal and infant health services to families in the State without health insurance coverage for these services.

Thirteen years after substantial funding and continued community support, the UDOH, along with Governor Michael Leavitt and First Lady Jacalyn S. Leavitt, are pleased to announce this monumental, statistically significant improvement. This progress is partly due to numerous maternal and child health education programs such as the visible Baby Your Baby program. Baby Your Baby is an award winning media campaign reaching more than 300,000 women in need of resources. Baby Your Baby is more than a media campaign, it is a community-wide effort supported by legislators, hospitals, physicians, local health departments, community health centers, Medicaid eligibility workers and others who have made the program work by funding, enrolling and caring for these women and children over the years.

In addition to programs associated with Baby Your Baby, the local health departments, the Women, Infant and Children program and improved life-saving techniques, equipment and knowledge in the hospital's neonatal wards and have contributed to the record low.

“This is an excellent example of the public investment in prevention paying off over the long run,” said Dr. Williams. “It also shows how important it is for public health to stay focused on a measurable goal. Every year we have over 16,000 women who are pregnant for the first time and many of them are in need of this set of information and services. In order to sustain this success in helping families have healthy babies, this is something we'll be doing for a long time to come.”