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**SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL INFANT MORTALITY AWARENESS MONTH
A HEALTHY BABY BEGINS WITH YOU!**

ST. AUGUSTINE - Infant mortality, the death of a baby before the age of one, is a sentinel indicator of a community’s health. While the 2010 St. Johns County infant mortality rate of 4.4 is low compared to the state of Florida rate of 6.5, everyone agrees that even one infant death is too many.

The St. Johns County Health Department and the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition remind the community that everyone can play an important role in reducing infant mortality by encouraging pregnant women to seek prenatal care in their first trimester, and by educating themselves, family members and the community about factors that contribute to infant mortality. These factors include smoking, substance abuse, poor nutrition, lack of prenatal care, medical problems and chronic illnesses.

“While not all infant deaths are preventable, we do know that there are some things that can be done to reduce the risk of infant deaths,” said Carol Brady, Executive Director of the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition.

“The most important things an expectant mother can do to prevent prematurity and a low birthweight are to get prenatal care, take prenatal vitamins and lead a healthy lifestyle,” adds Dawn C. Allicock, M.D., M.P.H., Director of the St. Johns County Health Department.

Why is Birthweight Important?

Low birthweight (under 2500 grams or about 5 1/2 pounds) is associated with premature birth. Babies born with a low birthweight are more likely than babies of normal weight to require specialized medical care, and often must stay in an intensive care unit. Though many medical advances have increased the survival rates of premature infants significantly, low birthweight babies remain at risk for infant death or long-term disability.

Reducing the rate of low birthweight babies is a key objective of the St. Johns County Health Leadership Council, of which the Health Department and the Healthy Start Coalition are members. In their recently released 2011 Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan, the Council set a goal to reduce the percentage of low birthweight infants from the 2009 rate of 6.7%, to 6.3% by 2014.

Our Mission: *To protect and promote the health of all residents and visitors St. Johns County.*

Our Vision: *A healthier future for the people of Florida.*

Our Values: *- Integrity; Commitment to Service; Respect; Excellence; Accountability; Teamwork; Empowerment –*



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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

The St. Johns County Infant Mortality Task Force, an initiative of the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition, will lead that effort by focusing on three factors that contribute to low birthweight babies:

1. Promoting a healthy pre-pregnancy weight (Body Mass Index, also called “BMI”)
2. Reducing tobacco usage among pregnant women.
3. Increasing intervals between pregnancies (also called “baby-spacing”)

Strategies of the Task Force will concentrate on prevention and education-enhanced prenatal care, including:

- Providing OB/GYNs with information about local infant mortality trends, and the community efforts to impact them.
- Programs supporting and encouraging healthy eating and lifestyles for women, both before and during pregnancy.
- Smoking cessation programs for pregnant women and their families.

The mission of the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition is to lead a cooperative community effort to reduce infant mortality and improve the health of children, childbearing women and their families in Northeast Florida. For further information, visit <http://nefhealthystart.org/>

For information about these initiatives, or for additional information about prenatal counseling services and referrals available at the St. Johns County Health Department, visit <http://www.stjohnschd.org>.

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