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Until 12 a.m. May 6, 2015

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Mayor Barrett Announces 2014 Infant Mortality Data, Decreases Seen in all Categories

Pushed by lowest number of infant deaths in recent history, focus continues on preventing premature births

MILWAUKEE – Today, Mayor Tom Barrett announced the City of Milwaukee 2014 infant mortality data. Preliminary data from the City of Milwaukee Health Department indicates that in 2014, 84 infants died in Milwaukee prior to their first birthdays, the lowest number in recent history. Using three-year rolling averages, which are statistically more reliable than single-year data, the overall infant mortality rate for the city of Milwaukee from 2012-2014 decreased to 9.9 infant deaths for every 1,000 live births from a rate of 10.2 in 2011-2013.

“We are encouraged to see infant mortality rates once again trend downward,” said Mayor Tom Barrett. “However, the racial disparity in birth outcomes remains unacceptable and the rate of improvement remains inadequate, particularly for African-American babies. We must continue to do more to bring down these rates.”

The 2012-2014 three-year rolling average rates decreased in each racial and ethnic group, with the Hispanic rate dropping to an all-time low of 4.0 per 1,000 live births in 2012-2014 from a previous rate of 5.3 per 1,000 live births. The rate for non-Hispanic white infants decreased slightly to 5.2 per 1,000 live births in 2012-2014 from a rate of 5.5 per 1,000 live births. And the African-American rate decreased slightly to 15.3 per 1,000 live births in 2012-2014 from a rate of 15.6 per 1,000 live births.

“The specific causes of death for each of these 84 babies have not yet been fully analyzed, but we know from prior experience that the leading cause by far is complications of preterm birth,” said Bevan K. Baker, Commissioner of Health for the City of Milwaukee Health Department. “While improving access to health care and reducing individual behaviors such as smoking are important, we must address this issue more effectively by focusing on the biggest driver of preterm birth: chronic, unmitigated stress, particularly chronic stress from poverty, racism and other sources.”

Health officials say the trend indicates that Milwaukee is on-track to reach Mayor Barrett’s goal of reducing the overall infant mortality rate to 9.4 per 1,000 live births by 2017, but is not on-track to reach the simultaneous goal of reducing the African-American infant mortality rate to 12.0 by 2017. Black infants remain nearly three times more likely to die than white infants.

To address this disparity, Mayor Barrett is calling for a redoubling of community-wide efforts to address the root causes of infant mortality, with a particular emphasis on reducing premature births overall and within the African-American community. To do so, Mayor Barrett serves as co-chair of the Milwaukee Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families, a communitywide collaborative led by United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County, focused on reducing Milwaukee’s racial disparities in birth outcomes. The initiative is funded by the UW School of Medicine and Public Health from the Wisconsin Partnership Program.

“While we are pleased at these recent improvements, the racial disparity remains unacceptable,” said Mary Lou Young, president and CEO of United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County. “Our vision is to eliminate the racial disparity in birth outcomes, ensuring every baby reaches their first birthday. Our greatest opportunity to improve birth outcomes is to focus on preventing prematurity and on addressing the conditions that lead to premature births. All partners within the Milwaukee LIHF Collaborative will continue our efforts, with particular attention on driving improvements for African-American babies, who continue to die at a rate nearly three times that of white infants.”

For data and public health recommendations on reducing infant mortality, please see attached documents.

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