



Tom Barrett
Mayor

Bevan K. Baker, FACHE
Commissioner of Health

Sandra J. Rotar
Health Operations Administrator

Health Department

www.milwaukee.gov/health

Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 North Broadway, 3rd Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3653 phone (414) 286-3521 fax (414) 286-5990

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Contact: Sarah DeRoo
Office (414) 286-3548
Cell (414) 708-4060

Mayor Barrett Releases 2016 Infant Mortality Data & Fetal Infant Mortality Review Report

Overall infant mortality rate declines, African-American rate reaches lowest in recent history; report issues call for action to prevent prematurity

MILWAUKEE – Today, Mayor Tom Barrett and the City of Milwaukee Health Department announced Milwaukee’s 2016 infant mortality data and simultaneously released the 2012-2015 Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) report. Together, the reports provide an update on the citywide progress in reducing infant mortality along with an in-depth look at the causes and risk factors contributing to infant deaths and stillbirths in the city.

Preliminary data from the City of Milwaukee Health Department indicates that in 2016, 88 infants died in Milwaukee prior to their first birthdays, the second 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 2014-2016 has decreased to 9.0 infant deaths for every 1,000 live births. This is the lowest rate in recent history.

“We are encouraged to see that steady progress continues in preventing infant deaths,” said Mayor Tom Barrett. “However, a 13 percent decline since setting our citywide goal is not enough, and the racial disparity in birth outcomes remains unacceptably high. When the leading causes of infant deaths are mostly preventable, we must use these reports to prioritize steps toward prevention.”

The 2014-2016 three-year rolling average rates also decreased among both African-American and Hispanic populations, with the black rate dropping to a low of 13.6 per 1,000 live births. The rate for Hispanic infants declined to 4.2 per 1,000 live births. The rate for non-Hispanic white infants saw an increase to 5.0 per 1,000 live births. However, black infants remain nearly three times more likely to die before their first birthday than white infants.

While the current infant mortality rate tentatively brings the city below its goal of reaching an overall infant mortality rate of 9.4 by the release of 2017 data, officials caution that subsequent years may see rates once again increase, and that even if the overall rate remains below the goal of 9.4 a year from now, it is unlikely the City will meet its 2015-2017 goal of 12.0 for the African-American rate. As a result, they call for more intensive, communitywide attention to the leading causes of infant deaths.

The Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) report, the seventh released since 1993, presents a comprehensive analysis of the causes and contributing risk factors for all infant deaths and stillbirths in the city from 2012 through 2015, as well as an understanding of the disparities in causes of infant death among racial and ethnic groups.

The FIMR report finds the leading cause of all infant deaths from 2012-2015 in Milwaukee remains complications of prematurity, which accounted for 55.8% of all infant deaths. Prematurity was followed by congenital anomalies (birth defects), which accounted for 20.8% of infant deaths, and sleep-related deaths, which accounted for 15.9% of all infant deaths. Racial and ethnic minorities bear a disproportionate burden of prematurity-related deaths, with the overwhelming burden found among black mothers.

“The call to action is clear. The leading cause of infant deaths remains complications of prematurity,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “While we must redouble our efforts to improve access

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to quality health care and improve individual behaviors such as smoking, we will not be able to address this issue without focusing on the primary driver of premature births: chronic, unmitigated stress, particularly from poverty, unemployment, excessive incarceration rates, housing instability, racism, and other socioeconomic factors.”

To eliminate this disparity, Mayor Barrett and health officials call for greater communitywide investment in addressing the root causes of infant deaths, particularly among black mothers. To lead a coordinated effort, Mayor Barrett serves as co-chair of the Milwaukee Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families (Milwaukee LIHF), a collaborative led by United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County, with support provided by the UW School of Medicine and Public Health from the Wisconsin Partnership Program. The collaborative, focused on reducing Milwaukee’s racial disparity in birth outcomes, recently announced its prematurity prevention priorities.

“United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County is committed to investing human and financial capital into promoting positive birth outcomes for all families”, said Nicole Angresano, Vice President of Community Impact at United Way. “I can think of no more important outcome than that of a healthy baby, born ready to thrive.”

For full 2016 data and the 2012-2015 Fetal Infant Mortality Review Report, please see attached documents.

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