



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 16, 2012

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**Saturday is World Prematurity Day
Health Department Programs Educate Expectant
Moms to have Healthy Pregnancy Outcomes**

GRAND RAPIDS – Michigan’s infant mortality rate is 17 times higher for premature births than those who are born at full term. Our state ranks 31st in the nation for premature births, 36th for African-American preterm births in the United States. Saturday, November 17, is World Prematurity Day. The Kent County Health Department offers several programs to help women deliver happy, healthy babies.

The most common cause of death in newborns in Michigan is premature birth. While great strides have been made helping premature babies survive, these babies often start life in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, and face learning issues, physical disabilities, and behavioral concerns.

“Women who receive counseling, good nutrition and dental care before and during their pregnancy are more likely to have healthier babies,” says Cathy Raevsky, the Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. “Our staff, including those working in the Maternal Infant Health Program and the Interconception Care Program, is dedicated to helping women experience better birth outcomes.”

Kent County’s Interconception Care (IC) Program is finding significant success in helping mothers who had recent poor birth outcomes, such as a premature delivery, low-weight birth, miscarriage or stillbirth. The program, which includes intensive case-management and delaying the next pregnancy, has been very successful. In the next pregnancy, babies are carried on average 5 weeks longer and born 50% heavier than in the previous pregnancy.

The Kent County Health Department, along with the Michigan Department of Community Health and the March of Dimes, is promoting strategies to encourage health care providers and mothers with healthy pregnancies to deliver at 39 weeks, which is when the baby is fully developed. Many vital organs, such as the brain, lungs and liver, are still developing right up to this time. For example, a baby’s brain at 35 weeks weighs only two-thirds of what it will weight at 39-40 weeks.

The Kent County Health Department also recommends clients who are planning to become pregnant, are pregnant, or recently delivered a baby, try out a free texting service to get health tips. Women can sign up by visiting www.text4baby.org or text BABY to 511411 (or BEBE for Spanish). The

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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service sends three free SMS text messages each week, timed to the baby's due date or date of birth. Messages include information about birth defects prevention, immunization, nutrition, oral health, safe sleep, and more. Text4baby is made possible through a broad, public-private partnership that includes government, corporations, academic institutions, professional associations, non-profit organizations, and more.

The state of Michigan is in the midst of a campaign to prevent premature births and infant deaths. Strategies announced by Governor Snyder include:

- 1) Implementation of a Regional Perinatal System
- 2) Reduce/eliminate medically unnecessary deliveries before 39 weeks gestation
- 3) Promote safe sleeping practices to prevent suffocation
- 4) Expand home-visiting programs to support vulnerable women and infants
- 5) Reduce unintended pregnancies and expand pregnancy prevention programs for teens
- 6) Promote reduction of racial and ethnic disparities in infant mortality

For more information about what is being done to reduce infant mortality in Michigan, visit <http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,4612,7-132-2942-216919--,00.html>.

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