

## News Releases

# DHEC News Release: Number of infant deaths remains unchanged

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 11, 2012

### Number of infant deaths remains unchanged

COLUMBIA, S.C. - South Carolina's overall infant mortality rate continues to show an overall downward trend for the last two decades, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control announced today.

In 2010, 430 infants died before their first birthday. That number is identical to the number who died in 2009. The variance in the statistical representation is due to fewer babies being born in 2010 as compared to 2009.

The data confirms that, despite the slight increase from 7.1 deaths per 1,000 babies in 2009 to 7.4 per 1,000 in 2010, South Carolina's overall infant mortality rate continues to show an overall downward trend for the last two decades. Rates have shown a steady downward trend since 1991, when the state's rate was 11.2 deaths per 1,000 babies born, equating to a loss of 644 infants that year.

"We're pleased to see the overall longterm downward trend of this data," said DHEC Director Catherine Templeton. "We believe that holding steady with last year's number, which was an historic low for our state, is a sign that efforts on the ground by DHEC and a host of partners are making an impact in the lives of South Carolina's children.

"This is a multi-faceted effort, and with the commitment of our partners, such as the SC Department of Health and Human Service, the March of Dimes, our state's private physician practices and faith-based organizations, pregnant women have more access to needed services, which improves health outcomes for both the mother and her baby," Templeton said.

Congenital malformations and disorders among infants born too soon or too small continue to be the two leading causes of death among infants less than one year of age. The third leading cause of death was once again Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

While the overall statistical rate was up .3 for all races in the state, the 2010 infant mortality rate for blacks and other minorities was still below the U.S. average for those children. The U.S. rate for blacks was 11.6, while South Carolina's rate for blacks and other minorities was 10.9. South Carolina's rate for white infants was slightly higher than the national average. The national rate for white infants was 5.2, while South Carolina's was 5.5.

One way to reduce infant mortality is to improve the health and well being of the mother even before getting pregnant. Women should talk with their doctor about ways to get ready for a healthy pregnancy. They should see their health care provider before and as soon as they think they are pregnant; have regular prenatal visits; and avoid exposure to tobacco, alcohol and other harmful substances. It is also important that women focus on the prevention and management of chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes so that women are healthy before they become pregnant.

"The infant mortality rate is an important health outcome measure," said Templeton. "It is often used as a measure of the overall health status of a given population and should be one of our primary focuses as a society.

"While we are all glad that the actual overall number of deaths didn't increase in 2010, that's not enough. We are not satisfied that the statistical representations increased and will be working to move those numbers back in a downward direction," Templeton stressed.

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#### NOTE TO EDITORS:

A complete breakout of the data is available on DHEC's **South Carolina Community Assessment Network (SCAN) website** <<http://www.scdhec.gov/health/scpublichealthstatisticsmaps/biostatisticspublications/>>.

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