



## KANE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT MEDIA ADVISORY

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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#### *November is National Prematurity Awareness Month*

While Kane County's infant mortality rate is below state and national averages, the Kane County Health Department is emphasizing the importance of pre- and post natal care to the health of infants by including infant deaths due to prematurity and low birth weight as one of the top three health concerns on the county's IPLAN.

Prematurity, birth that occurs three or more weeks early, is the leading cause of death in the first month of life. The rate of premature births continues to rise across the United States and, in addition to mortality, is a major determinant of illness and disability among infants, including developmental delays, chronic respiratory problems and vision and hearing impairment, according to the March of Dimes,

While the specific causes of spontaneous preterm labor and delivery are largely unknown, research indicates that they are likely due to a complex interplay of multiple risk factors, as opposed to any single isolated risk factor. Approximately three-quarters of all preterm births occur spontaneously, and the remainder result from medical intervention to deliver the baby early due to maternal or fetal conditions.

- Generally, factors that increase the risk of having a spontaneous preterm birth fall into the following categories: demographic and genetic characteristics, behavioral and environmental factors, and medical and obstetric history.
- The most consistently identified risk factors include a history of preterm birth, current multifetal pregnancy and some uterine and/or cervical abnormalities.
- Other possible risk factors include: infection (especially genito-urinary), diabetes mellitus, hypertension, late or no prenatal care, smoking, alcohol and illicit drug use.
- In Illinois in 2004, 11.0 percent of singleton births were preterm, compared to 62.9 percent of multiple births. Multiple births represent 3.9 percent of live births in Illinois.
- Smoking is an important determinant of health and a significant factor contributing to preterm and low birth weight births. In 2003, 22.9 percent of women of childbearing age reported smoking in Illinois.

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- While being obese does not directly cause preterm birth, it does increase rates of medical complications (e.g., hypertension, diabetes) that do contribute to preterm birth. In Illinois, 19.5 percent of women of childbearing age were obese in 2003.

In Kane County:

- The infant mortality rate for 2004 stood at 6.1 per 1,000 live births. In 2002 the rate was 5.4, in 2003 it was 6.5. Disparity among infants is evident by the 17.2 infant mortality rate for African American, which is nearly triple the rate for all county infants.
- In 2004, there were 8,569 births and 52 recorded infant deaths. In 2002, there were 8,299 births and 45 infant deaths. In 2003, the numbers were 8,397 and 54.
- In 2002, the last year for which these statistics are available, the rate of infant deaths due to prematurity/low birth weight per 100,000 live births was 208.3, up from 175.2 in 2001, and 128.3 in 2000.

Premature birth is the number one killer of newborns and babies who survive could be disabled for life. More than half a million babies are born prematurely every year and the number is rising. Premature birth costs society billions.

According to a cost analysis published by the March of Dimes, the total national hospital bill for premature babies was \$18.1 billion in 2002. Almost half of this was billed to employers and other private insurers. This analysis also found that health care costs to employers for a premature baby during the first year of life average more than \$41,610, compared to about \$2,830 for a full-term baby.

Because of the devastating health and economic consequences, November has been designated as Prematurity Awareness Month as part of a national effort to save babies from premature birth. By including prematurity in its IPLAN, with a focus on disparities, the Kane County Health Department is committed to working on this issue with its community partners for the next five years.

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