



NEWS RELEASE



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ohio Hospital Association, Ohio Department of Health Partnership Promotes Breastfeeding

New Statewide Initiative Aims to Reduce Ohio's Infant Mortality Rate

Columbus, Ohio – (March 25, 2015) The Ohio Hospital Association (OHA) and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) this week launched “[Ohio First Steps for Healthy Babies](#),” a breastfeeding program to recognize maternity centers in Ohio that have taken steps to promote and support breastfeeding with new moms.

“Reducing infant mortality in Ohio is a focus area for Ohio hospitals, and this program is intended to help improve breastfeeding initiation and duration rates in Ohio to support that goal,” said Mike Abrams, OHA president and CEO. “The medical evidence for breastfeeding is clear and incontrovertible, showing that breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for both mom and baby. Ohio hospitals are committed to addressing the infant mortality issue by increasing breastfeeding among new moms in Ohio.”

Through this new program, hospitals will be recognized based on progress toward achieving the [Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding](#), as defined by the World Health Organization. The Ten Steps are intended to promote breastfeeding-supportive hospital environments and increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates through policy and practice supports. Through the Ohio First Steps program, hospitals will be recognized for every two steps achieved and will have opportunities for learning and sharing of best practices.

“Breastfeeding is an effective intervention for reducing infant mortality as well as reducing the rate of infant respiratory infections, gastrointestinal tract infections, obesity and more,” said Dr. Mary DiOrio, Medical Director of the Ohio Department of Health. “It is clear that initiatives such as ‘Ohio First Steps for Healthy Babies’ are essential to provide mothers and families with the support they need to give babies healthy beginnings and increase breastfeeding rates.”

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OHA and ODH hosted a webinar today for Ohio maternity hospitals to officially kick off the recognition program. A representative from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) discussed Ohio's maternity practices in Infant Nutrition and Care ([mPINC](#)) survey data, as well as how hospitals with breastfeeding supportive environments can have a positive impact on breastfeeding initiation and duration. The first round of hospital recognitions will be announced later this year.

Because of the numerous benefits to the mother and infant, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months, followed by continued breastfeeding as complementary foods are introduced for the first year. Multiple studies have linked breastfeeding to a reduction in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and infant mortality, as well as a reduction in asthma, childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes, ear infections and more.

ODH is working to advance breastfeeding efforts both in the hospital and throughout a child's first six months of life. Breastfeeding is associated with a number of short and long term health benefits and is a critical factor in both reducing infant mortality and preventing chronic diseases. Because increasing support for breastfeeding in hospitals is an objective in both the state's forthcoming infant mortality strategic plan and [Ohio's Plan to Prevent and Reduce Chronic Disease: 2014-2018](#), the statewide chronic disease strategic plan, this alignment will bring together partners from healthcare, worksites, and daycares to make sure all women are supported and encouraged to initiate and continue breastfeeding. This new recognition program is one of the first steps in this process.

Ohio First Steps for Healthy Babies supports OHA's ongoing efforts to reduce infant mortality in Ohio. OHA's strategy is to collaborate with hospitals and partners in Ohio to address infant mortality through multiple initiatives including infant safe sleep, breastfeeding, eliminating elective deliveries before 39 weeks, progesterone treatment for high risk mothers, safe spacing, access to pre, post and internatal care and addressing vital health disparities. Additionally, OHA partnered with Cincinnati-based pediatrician and author Dr. John Hutton and Cincinnati-based artist and illustrator Leah Busch to create the book, "*Eat baby, healthy*," for hospitals to use as an educational support tool when talking with moms and families about breastfeeding, as well as infant and maternal nutrition.

In 2014, OHA launched the [Safe Sleep is Good4Baby](#) program promoting the preferred methods of infant safe sleep, promoted by ODH and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Ohio's hospitals have a unique opportunity to reach the parents of nearly 140,000 newborns every year with educational messages about the importance of providing a safe sleeping environment. The program currently has 113 participating Ohio hospitals promoting the [ABCs of Safe Sleep](#), which recommend all infants be placed to sleep Alone, on their Backs and in a Crib every time.

To learn more about OHA's infant mortality efforts and other population health initiatives, [click here](#).

About OHA:

Established in 1915, the [Ohio Hospital Association](#) represents 220 hospitals and 13 health systems throughout Ohio. OHA, marking its centennial year in 2015, is the nation's oldest state hospital association. With a mission to collaborate with member hospitals and health systems to ensure a healthy Ohio, OHA is focused on three strategic initiatives: patient safety and quality, advocacy and economic sustainability.