

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**  
*Office of the Governor*

Timothy M. Kaine  
Governor

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**GOVERNOR KAINE ANNOUNCES INFANT MORTALITY  
RATE REDUCED TO LOWEST LEVEL IN STATE  
HISTORY**

*~ Rate among African-Americans also falls to historic low ~*

**RICHMOND** – Governor Timothy M. Kaine announced today that Virginia’s infant mortality rate has declined to its lowest level in history, with 6.7 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008, down from 7.7 in 2007. The rate among the state’s African-American population was also reduced to its lowest levels ever, with 12.2 deaths per 1,000 in 2008, down from 15.5 in 2007. These dramatic improvements follow major efforts by the Kaine administration to reduce the Commonwealth’s infant mortality rate—including the establishment of the Health Reform Commission in 2006—which recommended targeted strategies to improve this critical health indicator.

“While we mark today’s announcement as a major milestone in the health care outcomes of our Commonwealth, we all know that there is still work to be done,” said Governor Kaine. “We have not only set a new benchmark for Virginia’s overall infant mortality rate, we are seeing encouraging progress in closing the gap in racial health disparities.”

Governor Kaine set the goal of reducing Virginia’s infant mortality rate to below 7.0 per 1,000 live births, a goal the state has now exceeded. A state’s infant mortality rate—the number of deaths before age one per 1,000 live births, reflects the quality and availability of prenatal and birth care for both children and mothers. While the rate in Virginia has been trending down over the years, from 12.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1982, the rate has consistently remained higher than the national average. At the same time, the rate among African-Americans has consistently exceeded that of the overall population.

Under Governor Kaine’s leadership, a number of policies have directly targeted the challenge of infant mortality, including:

- **FAMIS MOMs Program**—Effective July 1, 2009, expectant mothers with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level are eligible for Virginia’s FAMIS MOMs program to provide more women with prenatal care.
- **Virginia Department of Health Programs**—Working in collaboration with stakeholders, the Virginia Department of Health administers a variety of programs, including *Resource Mothers*, which promotes the health of pregnant women and women with young children. The department also makes concerted efforts to educate parents on SIDS and safe sleeping for children.
- **Future Moms Program**—Established in 2008, this program reduces out-of-pocket expenses for state employees and their families who enroll in early prenatal care.

“As a result of Governor Kaine’s leadership, we have been able to expand eligibility for the FAMIS MOMs program to 200 percent of the federal poverty level,” said Patrick Finnerty, director of the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services. “Because access to prenatal care is essential for healthy pregnancies and deliveries, this expansion means that more pregnant women will get the care they need, have positive birth outcomes, and their babies will have a healthy start in life.”

State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA formed the Commissioner’s Working Group on Infant Mortality in 2008 to address Virginia’s infant mortality rate. The group brings together leaders from the health care industry, community and faith organizations, the business community, insurers, educators and associations such as the AARP, March of Dimes and the NAACP. The Virginia Department of Health’s *Saving Babies* initiative has provided funding for 10 of the state’s localities with the highest number of infant deaths and engaged community partners in developing strategies, plans and actions for reducing the number of infant deaths. “We are sharing those best practices statewide,” she said.

“Education plays a critical role in preventing infant deaths and the more we engage organizations throughout our communities the more successful our initiatives will be,” said Commissioner Remley. “We’ve made some important gains in understanding this problem and it is critical that we share best practices statewide.”

Governor Kaine made today’s announcement in front of the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial on Capitol Square. Appearing with him were numerous public and private sector officials who have strongly supported the campaign to reduce infant mortality rates in Virginia.