Maternal and Infant Mortality

What’s happening worldwide?

The World Health Organization and United Nations are addressing maternal and infant mortality rates across the globe. These organizations and other international bodies have delineated goals to reduce maternal death rates by 5.5 percent yearly, and a two-thirds reduction in the under-five mortality rate by 2015. Worldwide, 536,000 women died of maternal causes in 2005, the vast majority in developing countries. There were 400 deaths per 100,000 live births worldwide. Infant mortality rates vary across areas of the world, the highest are in undeveloped countries.¹

Life Insurance and Market Research Association (LIMRA) provided a summary of the global maternal and infant mortality rates and goals for reduction—“Maternal and Infant Mortality: A Global Snapshot”. To view the complete summary report click here. Click here for a summary of the data.

What’s happening in the United States?

Preterm birth

The March of Dimes published its first annual Premature Birth Report Card comparing actual preterm birth rates to the National Healthy People 2010 objective (to lower the rate to 7.6 percent for all live births). According to the Premature Birth Report Card, the United States is failing. Overall, the nation received a “D”, not a single state earned an “A”. The latest data (2005) shows that the national preterm birth rate is 12.7 percent.²

The Premature Birth Report Card provides state rankings, including analysis of rates of late preterm birth, smoking, and uninsured women of childbearing age, which are contributing factors and areas of focus for prevention. Vermont was the only state to earn a “B”. Eight states earned a “C”, twenty-three states a “D”, and eighteen, including Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia received an “F”.²

The purpose of the report card is to raise public awareness and support for improved education, clinical practices and research, and to increase federal and state support for preterm birth prevention initiatives. Premature birth affects more than 530,000 infants each year in the United States.² The report card proposes strategies for hospital leaders, businesses, and policymakers to help address issues that may contribute to preterm birth rates. According to the March of Dimes, report card grades in 2009 will reflect actions taken by states that have potential to reduce future preterm birth rates.²
Maternal mortality

According to data from the CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics, the U.S. maternal mortality rate was 13 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2004, the highest in decades. A total of 540 women were reported to have died of maternal causes in 2004, 45 more than were reported in 2003. Experts suggest that a rise in the rate of cesarean sections and associated complications, race and quality of care, and obesity are possible factors. An additional factor may be states’ use of a separate item on the death certificate indicating pregnancy status of the woman.3

Sources: