



## Five-Year Review of Infant Deaths Released by NEFHSC

2024 Project Impact Details Fetal and Infant Mortality Review of 162 Cases

**Jacksonville, Fla.** (Oct. 29, 2024) – Despite advances in medical care, infant mortality remains a significant concern across the U.S. and northeast Florida is no exception. Too many local families are affected by the loss of their babies each year. Infant mortality refers to the death of a child before his/her first birthday.

The Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition (NEFHSC) leads the region’s Fetal and Infant Mortality Review (FIMR), a community-oriented process that reviews the circumstances surrounding fetal and infant deaths to improve the health and safety of the community.

This year’s report – *2024 Project Impact* – covers a five-year span of cases from 2019 to 2023<sup>1</sup> reviewed by the FIMR team. It provides observations and insights about 162 of the 1,293 infant and fetal deaths (2019-2023) across Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and St. Johns counties. The five-year infant mortality rate for Northeast Florida is 6.9 percent per 1,000 live births, with Baker at 9.3 percent, Clay at 5.84, Duval at 7.5 percent, Nassau at 4.9 and St. Johns at 5.1 percent.

Cases reviewed include 125 infant deaths and 37 fetal deaths. Characteristics of those cases indicate:




- 65 percent were unplanned pregnancies
- 57 percent used Medicaid as the payment method
- 49 percent of the mothers had at least one chronic condition (obesity, hypertension, etc.)
- 48 percent of the mothers had significant stressors during pregnancy (violence in the home, unstable job or housing, etc.)
- 30 percent of the women used substances during pregnancy
- 22 percent had third trimester or no prenatal care

Over the past five years, nearly 15 percent of infants who died in Northeast Florida did so due to Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID), most of which were sleep-related. In almost all cases, those 93 deaths were preventable had parents and caregivers followed safe sleep practices. In the 31 sleep-related cases the FIMR team reviewed:

- 84 percent of the babies were sleeping on an unsafe surface such as an adult bed or couch;
- 94 percent of infants had objects in or near their sleep area; and
- 35 percent of the babies were not placed on their backs.

“Although one child’s death is one too many, we have seen a remarkable decrease this past year from 2022 regarding sleep-related deaths, which declined by 44 percent,” said Faye Johnson, CEO of NEFHSC. “We believe we’re starting to bend the curve in part to concerted efforts by our Healthy Start teams, hospitals, health care providers, nonprofits and other community partners helping to ensure parents and

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caregivers are implementing safe sleep practices. We must continue sharing the ABCs of safe sleep as most of these deaths are completely preventable.”

Each month, fetal and infant death cases are selected for evaluation based on specific criteria, including type of death, residence and race. Utilizing an approach developed by the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, information is abstracted from birth, death, medical, hospital and autopsy records. Case summaries are developed and presented to NEFHSC’s Case Review Team (CRT), a multidisciplinary group of community medical and social services professionals. The CRT examines each case to determine medical, social, financial and other issues that may have impacted the poor birth outcomes. Recommendations are crafted by the CRT based on these review findings and then shared with the Coalition’s Community Action Group (CAG), a group of volunteers working with at-risk families and other partner agencies in the region to develop and implement grassroots activities.

Based on the findings of this year’s report, the CRT is recommending:

- Increasing awareness of the causes of sleep-related deaths;
- Improving the health of women of childbearing age (15-44) through the creation of medical home models that address social determinants of health causing toxic stress; and
- Integrating specific policies into local governments to address social determinants of health that affect Black infant mortality.

The CAG is establishing specific strategies and tactics that will be implemented throughout the coming year and are detailed in the [2024 Project Impact](#) report.

### **About the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition**

The NEFHSC leads the community effort to reduce infant death and improve the health of children, childbearing women, fathers and their families in Northeast Florida. For more information, view [our media kit](#) or contact Markale Ford at [mford@nefhsc.org](mailto:mford@nefhsc.org) or 904.933.1320. Visit the [Florida Association of Healthy Start Coalitions](#) for statewide information or the [National Healthy Start Association](#) for national data.

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*Source: Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics; all 2023 data is provisional as of Oct. 28, 2024, and not considered final until released by the Florida Department of Health.*