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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL INFANT MORTALITY AWARENESS MONTH

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Each year, too many babies die before their first birthday. We continue to lose the equivalent of eight classes of kindergarteners in Northeast Florida because of preventable causes and lack of health services. In 2017, there were more infant deaths than murders in the five-county region.

September is National Infant Mortality Awareness Month and the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition continues to sound the alarm and raise awareness of infant mortality through education and activities. Despite being a sentinel indicator of the health of a community, the loss of our most vulnerable citizens is not recognized as a priority for community members and leaders.

The Coalition’s theme for the month this year is “It takes a village” – recognizing the important role of the community in ensuring every baby has a healthy start in life and calling on citizens to adopt this critical issue.

The Coalition is hosting the following activities:

- September 8: **Baby Buggy Walk in the Park** – The annual two-mile walk and health fair aims to bring awareness to healthy lifestyles and the impact they have on infant mortality. This year’s event will feature yoga by Titanium Yoga, a reading corner, health-related vendors and family fun at Klutho Park (204 W. 3rd St) from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- September 14: **On the Pulse: Toxic Stress** – The Museum of Science and History (MOSH) and the Coalition are partnering to discuss toxic stress and its impact on infant mortality and weathering. The event will feature yoga by Yoga4Change, a demonstration on the impact of stress of the body and stress-relief tips and tricks that the general public can take home, and health care and service providers can take back to the clients they serve. At MOSH (1025 Museum Circle) from 7 to 9 p.m.
- September 15: **NEFL Nurse-Family Partnership Graduation** – More than 30 two-year-olds donning caps and gowns will march down the aisle to “Pomp & Circumstance,” as the NFP Class of 2018 graduates from the evidence-based home-visiting program that ensures local moms have the education and resources to have a healthy baby. At UF Health Jacksonville Learning Resource Center (653 W. 8th St.) from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- September 22: **The Magnolia Project Community Baby Shower** – The annual baby shower, sponsored by State Rep. Tracie Davis, will provide education and community resources for new and expecting moms served by the Magnolia Project, a special federally-funded Healthy Start initiative that works to improve the health and well-being of women during their childbearing years in Health Zone 1. At Magnolia (5300 N. Pearl St.) from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

- September 24-29: **Empty Shoes Fatherhood Memorial Week** – This memorial event will raise awareness of the effects of loss from a father’s perspective. Local barbershops will display an empty baby shoes memorial in recognition of fathers, while educating fathers and fathers-to-be on infant mortality.. All week at Platinum Cutts (1704 Southside Blvd. and 2550 Mayport Rd.) and Chop Shop Barber Shop (7412 Atlantic Blvd.)
- September 27: **Healthy Families Jacksonville Graduation** – Healthy Families Jacksonville will celebrate the families that have completed the nationally-accredited family support and coaching program that helps parents provide the safe and stable environments children need for healthy growth and development. At the Kids Hope Alliance (1095 A. Philip Randolph Blvd.) from 5 to 7 p.m.
- September 29: **Empty Shoes Fatherhood Memorial Day** – Three barber shops in Jacksonville will commemorate the babies that died too soon and spread information on preventing infant mortality as part of the Barbers for Babies initiative. All day at Platinum Cutts (1704 Southside Blvd. and 2550 Mayport Rd.) and Chop Shop Barber Shop (7412 Atlantic Blvd.)

Infant mortality has decreased by 35 percent since the Healthy Start program and community-based Healthy Start coalitions were created in 1991. But despite these achievements, 137 babies died in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau and St. Johns counties in 2017 (compared to 123 murders during the same period). There were an additional 127 fetal deaths or stillbirths. The infant mortality rate was relatively unchanged in 2017, dropping slightly from 7.4 to 7.3 deaths per 1000 live births. The regional rate remains significantly higher than the state (6.1 deaths) and nation (5.9 deaths).

Trends of note include:

- Black babies die at 2.5 times the rate of white babies (12.5 deaths per 1000 live births, compared to 5.2 deaths). Racial disparities are persistent and defy socioeconomic status, education, individual health behaviors and a host of other factors that typically affect health. Growing evidence shows that racial discrimination -- not race itself -- is a leading indicator in predicting poor birth outcomes.
- One in five deaths was due to Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUIDs) in 2017, most of which were sleep-related. Over the past six years, a larger proportion of infant deaths have been attributed to SUIDs. The number of sleep-related deaths and the SUIDs death rate have both increased by nearly 30 percent. Bedsharing is a leading factor identified in sleep-related deaths.
- There has been a substantial growth in the number of substance-exposed newborns born – each year hundreds of babies in the region are born withdrawing from prenatal exposure, particularly to opioids. Babies born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome can experience high-pitched crying, seizures, sleep problems, poor feeding, diarrhea, poor weight gain, fever, nasal stuffiness and rapid breathing, in addition to potential lifelong issues and delays.
- Health during pregnancy is just a small factor impacting infant mortality. The health of a mother prior to pregnancy and the social determinants of health have a critical impact on babies in the womb and during infancy. Crime. Violence. Toxic stress. Access to care. Racism. Poverty. Food deserts. These all contribute to the poor birth outcomes that continue to impact Northeast Florida families.
- Only 70 percent of pregnant women in the region were offered the prenatal Healthy Start risk screen and 59 percent actually completed the screen, which assesses the risk for a poor birth outcome like prematurity and infant death. The screen is an important tool for identifying women and babies for an array of services that help families with health, parenting and more.

About the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition

The Healthy Start Coalition 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](#) visit us at <http://nefhealthystart.org> or on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram @nefhealthystart.

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