



September 4, 2015
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**FAMILY-FRIENDLY WALK, MUSIC FESTIVAL TO HIGHLIGHT SECOND ANNUAL
JACKSONVILLE BABY BUGGY WALK IN THE PARK**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – When families line up with strollers full of happy, healthy babies at Unity Plaza on September 12, they will unite Jacksonville with cities across the country to send a powerful message: babies need a healthy start in life.

The second annual Jacksonville Baby Buggy Walk in the Park is one of many festivals happening this fall to call attention to the link between healthy lifestyles, healthy families and healthy babies. The walks take place during National Infant Mortality Awareness Month, which aims to bring awareness to improving birth outcomes and reducing health disparities.

The event emphasizes the important role of parents and the community as a whole in preventing infant deaths and promoting health birth outcomes, particularly in minority communities. While the infant mortality rate is declining overall across the nation, rates still remain high in the Northeast Florida region, particularly among African American residents.

In 2014, the Northeast Florida black and other nonwhite infant death rate increased from 11.6 deaths per 1000 live births to 13.7 deaths, while the white rate is 4.9 deaths per 1000 live births. The disparity is significant — black babies are more than two and a half times as likely to die before their first birthday than white babies — and consistent.

The Baby Buggy Walk will provide an opportunity for families to come together for exercise; a health fair; stroller-decorating and costume- contest; and a fun day in the park, including a harvest music festival. The event begins at 4:30 pm at Unity Plaza, 220 Riverside Ave. in Historic Brooklyn.

Event sponsors include Brooks Rehabilitation, Molina Healthcare, Sunshine Health and Unity Plaza Jax. The first 100 families will receive a free book and participants will have the chance to win gift cards and passes to Moe's Southwest Grill, Bay & Bee, Hands On Children's Museum, Jax Stroller Strength, 4 Rivers Smokehouse, Jacksonville Ice & Sportsplex, the Jacksonville Suns and more.

The Baby Buggy Walk in the Park launched in Baltimore in 2012 as a pilot project and became one of Baltimore Healthy Start's signature Infant Mortality Awareness Month activities. Since then, it has become a national event celebrated in cities across the county and supported by the federal Office of Minority Health and the National Healthy Start Association.

About the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition

The Healthy Start Coalition leads a cooperative community effort to reduce infant mortality and improve the health of children, childbearing women and their families in Northeast Florida. For more information, visit <http://nefhealthystart.org> or <http://www.facebook.com/nefhealthystart>.

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