

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VDH 07-10**

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH LAUNCHES SURVEY TO  
HELP REDUCE THE STATE'S INFANT MORTALITY RATE**

(RICHMOND, Va.) – Starting this month, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will survey mothers of newborns to learn why some babies are born healthy and some are not.

Each month, about 100 mothers of 2- or 3-month-old babies will be randomly selected from VDH's listing of births in Virginia and asked to complete a questionnaire that will help public health officials and others understand what may be causing preventable deaths or diseases among infants. More mothers of low birth weight babies will be invited to participate because babies weighing less than 5.5 pounds at birth have higher rates of deaths and illnesses. Survey answers will help VDH develop a better understanding of how health care professionals and mothers can work together to improve birth outcomes.

"Gathering this type of information is absolutely vital to knowing how to reduce infant mortality, lessen the number of low birth weight babies and improve overall birth outcomes in Virginia," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. Virginia's infant mortality rate for 2005 was 7.4 per 1,000 births.

VDH was awarded a grant in 2006 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) in Virginia. PRAMS data are used by state and local governments to plan and review programs and policies aimed at reducing health problems among mothers and babies.

The PRAMS project supports Governor Timothy M. Kaine's Health Reform Commission, which is working to identify and implement best practices to improve health care in Virginia. The commission held a public meeting May 1 at George Mason University to gather recommendations from area residents regarding what they think should be done to ensure safe and affordable health care in the future. Additional public meetings are scheduled May 24 at the General Assembly Building in Richmond, and June 12 at James Madison University.

PRAMS survey forms will be mailed to the mothers who can then choose to return their responses in a postage-paid return envelope, or be contacted by phone. All answers will be kept confidential. The monthly surveys will be ongoing with data available on an annual basis. The first results are expected in about 18 months.

Mothers will be asked about their experiences with prenatal care and whether they encountered any barriers to good care. They will also be asked about health insurance coverage, breastfeeding attitudes and practices and their experiences with the "baby blues" after their babies were born.

For more information about PRAMS, call (877) 89 PRAMS (877) 897-7267), or visit [www.vahealth.org/prams](http://www.vahealth.org/prams).

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