



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

P O BOX 2448

RICHMOND, VA 23218

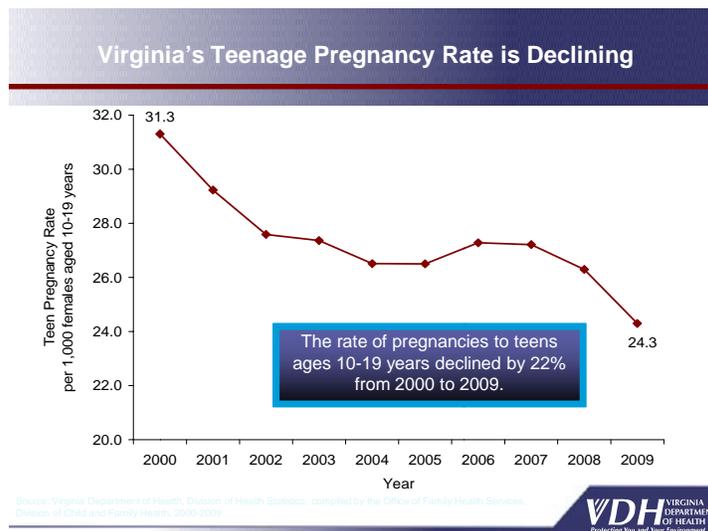
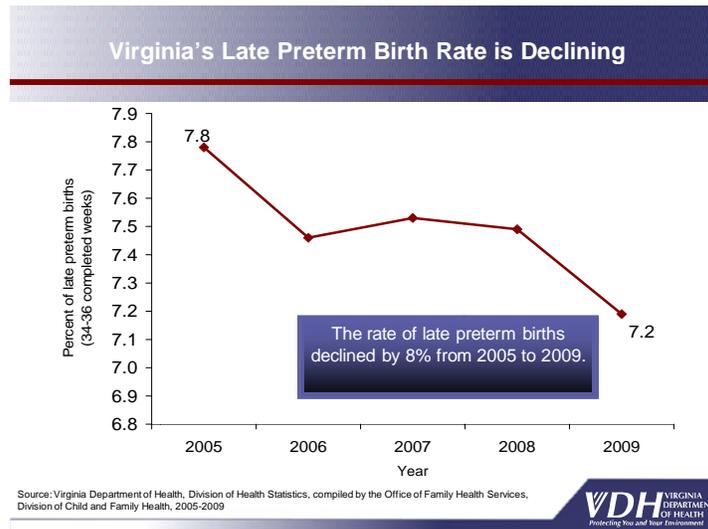
KAREN REMLEY, MD, MBA, FAAP  
STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER

TTY 7-1-1 OR  
1-800-828-1120

December 17, 2010

Dear Colleague,

As we approach the holiday season- a time for celebration and reflection- I want to take a moment to share with you some great news about our preterm and teen pregnancy rates. As a result of your efforts and those of hospitals, community organizations, health departments, in fact all those who care for and about women, families and children, more babies are being delivered at term and fewer teens are becoming parents.



This is great news for the Commonwealth. Infants born before 39 weeks gestation face such potential health complications as neurocognitive and pulmonary problems, feeding difficulties, and an increased risk for hospital readmission.

Likewise, infants born to teenage mothers are at increased risk for infant mortality based on such factors as increased likelihood of low birth weight and premature birth. Teen mothers have higher rates of late entry into prenatal care, post-partum depression and physical abuse. Compared to women who have children later, adolescent mothers are more likely to drop out of school, remain unmarried, and live in poverty.

Virginia's prematurity rates have decreased significantly over the five year period from 2005 to 2009 with the number of late preterm births declining 8% (from about 8,100 in 2005 to 7,500 in 2009). Early term births have dropped 13%. This has led to an increase in full term infants from 57.5% to 62.2% during the same time period (and an increase in the number of full term infants from 60,041 in 2005 to 65,276 in 2009).

Secondly, in 2008, the teenage pregnancy rate dropped to 26.3 per 1,000 females ages 10 to 19. Now, in 2009, there has been another significant decrease of 7.6% to a rate of 24.3 per 1,000 females ages 10 to 19. This equals 950 fewer teenagers becoming pregnant in 2009 compared to 2008, resulting in fewer teenage births, fetal deaths, and induced terminations.

I want to congratulate you on the important role you have played in bringing these rates down and improving the health of mothers and children in Virginia. Through the combined efforts of associations, doctors, nurses and hospitals, parents have been educated and advised about the importance of carrying their babies to term.

While the tide is turning, there is still work to do, which is why I am reaching out to you today. The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has consistently advised against non-medically indicated elective deliveries prior to 39 weeks gestation. Doctors in Virginia are leading the nation in addressing this issue and I thank you for continuing to engage in dialogues with patients about the importance of their prenatal decisions on their babies' long term health. The influence of doctors on their patient's decisions is great. With your assistance we can continue to empower women with the knowledge and tools they need to raise healthy, happy children.

Happy Holidays,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Karen Granger".