

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SPONSORS FIRST FREE MOBILE PHONE
HEALTH SERVICE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN AND NEW MOTHERS**

Virginia Conducted Pilot Program and is Model for the Country

(Richmond, Va.), February 10, 2010 – Today, the Virginia Department of Health announced its participation in [text4baby](#) – a new free mobile phone information service providing timely health information to pregnant women and new mothers during pregnancy and through a baby’s first year. Virginia was the only state in the country to pilot [text4baby](#) and serves as the model for the nation.

Women who sign up for the service by texting BABY to 511411 (or BEBE for Spanish) receive three free SMS text messages each week timed to their due date or baby’s date of birth. These messages focus on a variety of topics critical to maternal and child health, including birth defects prevention, immunization, nutrition, seasonal flu vaccination, mental health, oral health and safe sleep. [Text4baby](#) messages also connect women to prenatal and infant care services and other resources.

“The Virginia Department of Health is proud to be a part of [text4baby](#),” said Health and Human Resources Secretary, Bill Hazel, MD. “Mobile phone health services around the world have demonstrated the ability to help change patient behavior and improve health outcomes, and we believe that this program can have a significant impact on maternal and child health in our country.”

Virginia established a Virginia [text4baby](#) implementation team last summer that included key stakeholders and members of the Health Commissioner’s Infant Mortality Workgroup. Representatives from the Department of Medical Assistance Services/Medicaid, Virginia Section/ACOG, Virginia Chapter/AAP, Virginia Section/AWHONN, Virginia WIC, Richmond City Healthy Start, Virginia Healthy Start Initiative/Loving Steps, Inova Health System, an obstetrics private practice located in eastern Virginia, and The United Way are serving on this team.

Each year in the U.S., more than 500,000 babies are born prematurely and an estimated 28,000 children die before their first birthday. Virginia's infant mortality rate has declined to its lowest level in history, with 6.7 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008, down from 7.7 in 2007. The rate among the state's African-American population has also been reduced to its lowest levels ever, with 12.2 deaths per 1,000 in 2008, down from 15.5 in 2007.

“Education plays a critical role in preventing infant deaths and the more we engage organizations throughout our communities the more successful our initiatives will be,” said State Health Commissioner, Karen Remley, MD, MBA. “We’ve made some important gains in understanding this problem and it is critical that we share best practices nationwide.”

An educational program of the National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition (HMHB), [text4baby](#) delivers timely health tips via text message to those who need it most. It is made possible through an unprecedented public-private partnership which includes the White House Office on Science and Technology Policy, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Voxiva, CTIA-The Wireless Foundation, Grey Healthcare Group (a WPP company) and founding corporate sponsor Johnson & Johnson. Premier sponsors include WellPoint, Pfizer and CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield and wireless carriers are distributing text messages at no charge to recipients. Implementation partners include BabyCenter, Danya International, Syniverse Technologies, Keynote Systems and The George Washington University.

Virginia will continue to collaborate with the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition to promote [text4baby](#) throughout the state with a \$300,000 grant provided by CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield.

The [text4baby](#) wireless carriers are voluntarily providing the critical communications link of the initiative, distributing text messages to recipients at no charge. Participating carriers include: Alltel, AT&T, Cellular South, Cellcom, Centennial Cellular, Cincinnati Bell, Metro PCS, N-Telos, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, Verizon and Virgin Mobile.

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