



# State of Louisiana

Department of Health and Hospitals  
Maternal and Child Health Program

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
November 12, 2009

MEDIA CONTACT:  
Erica Normand, 504-561-7469  
Erica@trumpetgroup.com

## **NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL PREMATURITY AWARENESS MONTH**

### **LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HOSPITALS PROMOTES HEALTHY BEHAVIOR PRIOR TO PREGNANCY TO PREVENT PRETERM BIRTHS**

**Baton Rouge, LA** – In honor of National Prematurity Month, the state of Louisiana is committed to sharing an important message in hopes of lowering the risk of premature births- the general public needs to know how imperative it is to be healthy before pregnancy occurs. Preterm Births (PTBs) are the leading cause of infant mortality in Louisiana, 13.8% of all births were preterm in Louisiana in 2006. The causes of PTBs are complex and are often related to maternal chronic health conditions, sexually transmitted infections (STI), stress, substance or tobacco use, and twin gestations. It is essential that prevention and early intervention exist in order to tackle this problem.

**Research shows that prenatal care is not enough to “fix” years of poor health or poor health access.** The problem resides in the poor state of health in which women are entering pregnancy. Twenty-five percent of the women of childbearing age in Louisiana are uninsured, which means that many do not have access to medical attention until they are pregnant. This is not only a problem within itself, but directly increases healthcare costs as well.

“The high rate of women without healthcare before and between pregnancies is a devastating problem,” says Dr. Joan Wightkin, *Administrator of the Louisiana Maternal and Child Health Program*. “Not only is this a leading factor and contributor to preterm births, but also to the excessive number of infant deaths in the state. We should aim to reduce risk factors to prematurity, by assuring that preventive measures such as preconception and prenatal health care are in place, and that the public is informed about proper weight gain, birth spacing - and importantly the importance of a healthy lifestyle even before pregnancy occurs. Smoking and alcohol use among Louisiana women is on the rise both before and during pregnancy.”

Louisiana ranks 6th best in the nation for early and regular prenatal care. Louisiana women have many additional resources available during pregnancy, including programs such as LAMOMs Medicaid coverage of medical care for pregnant women; Nurse Family Partnership home visiting for low-income, first time moms; SBIRT-Screening, Brief Intervention Referral and Treatment for depression, domestic violence, alcohol, tobacco, and substance use in pregnancy; plus screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infections through Public Health Units, Community Health Clinics, and other medical providers.

**Partners for Healthy Babies** is funded by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health, Maternal and Child Health and WIC Programs. The program began because about 10 percent of all babies in Louisiana were born small and weak. Our goal is to link pregnant women to the services they need to help them be healthy, and have healthy babies. **1-800-251-BABY - [www.1800251baby.org](http://www.1800251baby.org)**