

## Infant Mortality Awareness Sample Letter to the Editor



Dear Editor:

Many Oklahoma babies do not survive to celebrate their first birthday. I am the [position/title] of [organization/group name], writing to bring attention to an important issue that touches all of us – infant mortality. Infant mortality is the death of a baby less than one year old. Although we have seen positive improvement, we still have much work ahead of us. Oklahoma’s infant mortality rate has consistently remained above the national average for more than two decades.

Premature birth (less than 37 completed weeks of pregnancy) is a leading cause of infant mortality and morbidity (sickness). Obesity in women is a risk factor for premature birth and increases the risk for diabetes and high blood pressure before and during pregnancy.

Many programs and interventions are being implemented to reduce infant mortality in communities across Oklahoma. *Preparing for a Lifetime, It's Everyone's Responsibility* is one such initiative. Multiple partners have joined efforts to educate the public and professionals on issues that impact infant mortality. Key health messages of the initiative include:

- Plan for pregnancy and be healthy before and between pregnancies to improve the chances of having a healthy baby.
- Achieve a healthy weight before getting pregnant.
- Get prenatal care as soon as you know you are pregnant.
- Take 400 mcg of folic acid daily to reduce the chances of having a baby with birth defects.
- Be aware that a full-term pregnancy lasts more than nine months (about 40 weeks).
- Breastfeed to help a baby get the best start in life.
- Place a baby on his or her back to sleep to help reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Avoid exposing a baby to secondhand smoke which can increase the chance of SIDS.
- Know the signs of postpartum depression and get help, if needed.
- Correctly install an approved infant car seat to help ensure a baby’s safety.
- Never, ever shake a baby.

We recognize that investing in the health and safety of Oklahoma’s moms and babies will reduce overall costs of often expensive medical treatments that premature babies may require. Supporting infant mortality prevention programs and initiatives now may prevent future spending on Medicaid, special education, and a myriad of other social services that may be needed for infants and children who are born prematurely or with a low birth weight.

Everyone – parents, grandparents, caretakers, providers, friends, neighbors, faith-based organizations, employers, universities – has a responsibility to take steps to help ensure the health and safety of Oklahoma’s babies. Find your role and make a difference. To learn more, visit <http://iio.health.ok.gov>.