

Md. needs pre-conception health care

The Daily Record

Letter to the Editor

January 23, 2009

A new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the number of teens and unwed women giving birth on the rise following years of decline. At the same time, according to the report, the percentage of women receiving prenatal medical care in their first trimester — the critical time for development — has been on the decline.

The Baltimore Sun's Frank Roylance, in his commentary entitled "CDC reports sudden uptick in births, troubling details" (Jan. 18), states that Maryland women scored "as well as or better than the national average."

Taken out of context, the notion that Maryland women and infants are faring as well or better than their national counterparts may provide Maryland health care providers and legislators with a mistaken sense of complacency. However, the report also shows "sharp contrasts in childbirth trends between racial and ethnic groups, with blacks and Hispanic mothers and their babies typically disadvantaged relative to whites."

In 2007, 112 babies in Baltimore City died before their first birthday. The mortality rate in Baltimore City disproportionately affects African-Americans by 3-to-1. Nearly as tragic is the number of babies born pre-term, those with low birth weight, who live with chronic health problems throughout their lives. African-American babies are twice as likely to have low birth weights as other infants.

Many factors can contribute to poor birth outcomes. However, one thing is certain: Healthier women have a better chance of having healthier babies. And since 50 percent of pregnancies are still unplanned, it's important for women to have reliable health care throughout their childbearing years.

That is why Planned Parenthood of Maryland (PPM) is joining with the statewide Babies Born Healthy initiative to emphasize the importance of health care before pregnancy even occurs (pre-conception health care).

PPM is dedicated to reducing Baltimore City's infant mortality rate by educating women and the public about the importance of pre-conception health care, screening for risk factors and chronic diseases, and providing referral services for women who need chronic disease management.

We believe that the Babies Born Healthy initiative can significantly impact future generations and we hope that the Maryland General Assembly will support and consider sustained funding for this crucial program.

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President and CEO

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