

## Infant mortality recommendations made



Photo by [Mike Shields](#)

Drs. Dennis Cooley, left, and Jason Eberhart-Phillips. The men appeared at a press conference announcing interim recommendations by the Kansas Blue Ribbon Panel on Infant Mortality. Cooley is the panel's chairman.

By [Sarah Green](#)

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The Kansas Blue Ribbon Panel on Infant Mortality on Wednesday announced a series of recommendations to lower the state's number of infant deaths.

The top priority is to amend Kansas law to allow the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to follow-up with mothers after their babies are born to better understand their pregnancies and risk factors. Current law does not allow KDHE to use information from birth certificates to contact parents.

A key feature of the change in the state statute would be the ability to collect data that would allow public health officials across the state to correct risk factors in their own communities, said Dr. Dennis Cooley, a pediatrician and chairman of the blue ribbon panel.

"Each community has a different set of problems that contribute to infant mortality," Cooley said.

The blue ribbon panel in July heard from a Michigan representative of a similar program, who said the ability to collect background information changed the way providers approached pregnant women.

In one instance, providers thought that a lack of transportation to health clinics for pregnant women was playing a significant role in contributing to infant deaths. The panel learned that many mothers

had access to transportation but were dealing with unplanned pregnancies and were not seeking necessary prenatal care.

The data collection recommendation has been introduced as Senate Bill 448, which will be heard in the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee on Monday.

Other recommendations:

- Increase public awareness and education on infant mortality that includes promotion of healthy lifestyles for pregnant women.
- Support practices and policies for early prenatal care and education.
- Support local communities with groups to address infant mortality.
- Pass a statewide smoking ban to limit the amount of secondhand smoke for pregnant women.

“Exposure to tobacco smoke is a big risk factor” for infant mortality, said Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips, director of health for KDHE. “A statewide clean indoor air law is one way we can get at this problem.”

The infant mortality panel was convened in response to data from 2007 that showed that Kansas’ rate of 7.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births was 20 percent higher than the national rate of 6.4 per 1,000 live births.

Also, infant mortality among black infants in Kansas is more than double that of the rate among white infants. Black babies account for 7 percent of births but 17 percent of deaths – ranking the state 47th worst in the nation.