



For Immediate Release: July 25, 2013

Contacts:

Susie Wallace
Director of Communications
Oklahoma Hospital Association
swallace@okoha.com
(405) 427-9537

Hospital Initiative Improves Health of Oklahoma Babies

An innovative statewide hospital initiative designed to reduce early elective scheduled births before 39 weeks of pregnancy has resulted in tremendous success since its inception two years ago. Data from the “**Every Week Counts**” initiative shows an 81 percent decrease in total scheduled deliveries between the first quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 2013.

Health problems related to pre-term births and low birth weight are the second leading cause of infant mortality in Oklahoma. Elective inductions and scheduled cesarean births in women who have not completed 39 weeks of pregnancy are known to contribute to problems for newborns, including premature birth and low birth weight.

Beginning in April 2011, 52 Oklahoma hospitals (90 percent of birthing hospitals) led by the Oklahoma Hospital Association and The Office of Perinatal Quality Improvement at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center launched a quality improvement collaborative designed to eliminate non-medically indicated scheduled cesarean births and inductions at less than 39 weeks. The initiative is funded by the March of Dimes Oklahoma Chapter and the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

“These results show that hospitals are doing their part to decrease prematurity and infant mortality in Oklahoma,” said LaWanna Halstead, vice president of quality and clinical initiatives, Oklahoma Hospital Association. “Hospital teams have worked diligently to lower the rate of unnecessary early scheduled births and to improve the health of the mothers and babies they serve.”

Scheduling a baby's date of delivery without a medical reason even just one to two weeks before their due date increases the baby's risk for issues such as breathing and feeding problems, sometimes requiring admission to a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and separation from mothers and families. The Every Week Counts collaborative brings together physicians, nurses and administrators from Oklahoma hospitals to develop strategies to prevent these births.

The usual length of time in which babies are born in Oklahoma and nationwide had decreased by an alarming one full week between 1995 and 2008. In 2008, 68 percent of births in Oklahoma occurred before the full-term 40 weeks of pregnancy was completed.

“While some conditions in the mother or baby may require early delivery, our aim is to eliminate the practice of inducing labor or scheduling a cesarean birth before 39 weeks of pregnancy without a medical indication in Oklahoma,” said Halstead.

“The collaborative enables hospitals to identify areas for improvement and compare progress with other hospitals. Many hospitals have shown a strong commitment to reducing non-medically necessary deliveries by instituting hard stop policies supported by the medical and executive leadership. I applaud all of those involved for their commitment to improving infant health in Oklahoma,” said State Health Commissioner Dr. Terry Cline.

“Every Week Counts” is part of the statewide “Preparing for a Lifetime, It's Everyone's Responsibility” initiative to reduce infant mortality in Oklahoma. For information about having a healthy baby, visit the “Preparing for a Lifetime, It's Everyone's Responsibility” website at: <http://iio.health.ok.gov>.

###

The Oklahoma Hospital Association represents more than 130 hospitals and health care entities across the state of Oklahoma. OHA's primary objective is to promote the welfare of the public by leading and assisting its members in the provision of better health care and services for all people. For more information, go to www.okoha.com.

The March of Dimes is the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. With chapters nationwide and its premier event, March for Babies, the March of Dimes works to improve the health of babies. For the latest resources and information, visit marchofdimes.com or nacersano.org. Find us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).

The Office of Perinatal Quality Improvement at The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, has worked with Oklahoma birthing hospitals for 27 years to improve maternal and infant care for Oklahoma families by providing education, maximizing resources and collaborating with partners to identify and remove barriers to providing safe, quality perinatal care.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health's “Preparing for a Lifetime, It's Everyone's Responsibility” is a statewide initiative to improve birth outcomes and reduce infant deaths in Oklahoma and focuses on seven specific areas: preconception and interconception care (being healthy before and between pregnancies), tobacco use prevention, prematurity, postpartum depression, breastfeeding, infant safe sleep, and infant injury prevention. Using state and community-based level partnerships, strategies include public education, policy change, and support of health care providers and birthing hospitals through training and technical assistance.