ISSUE BRIEF · OCTOBER 2026

Maternal & Child Health

Healthy children start with healthy pregnancies, healthy births, and support through the first five years.

Smart Start
of Mecklenburg County

5.0
infant deaths per 1,000 births in Mecklenburg, below NC (6.8) and the U.S. (5.6)[1]

3.7×
higher infant mortality for Black infants than white infants in Mecklenburg (8.8 vs. 2.4)[1]

1 in 5
women in Mecklenburg receive inadequate prenatal care[2]

The Issue

A child's health begins before birth. Prenatal care, a healthy delivery, postpartum support, and regular well-child care all shape how children grow and learn. Mecklenburg County has made real progress: infant mortality has declined to 5 deaths per 1,000 births, below both state and national rates.[1]

But progress is not shared equally. From 2021 to 2023, the infant mortality rate was 8.8 for non-Hispanic Black infants, 4.8 for Hispanic infants, and 2.4 for non-Hispanic white infants.[1] About one in five women in the county receives inadequate prenatal care.[2]

Why It Matters

Roughly 70 infants die in Mecklenburg County each year.[3] Perinatal conditions, such as those linked to preterm birth and low birth weight, cause nearly half of infant deaths, and sudden unexpected infant death is the leading cause of injury-related infant deaths.[1] Many of these outcomes can be improved through early, consistent care and education for families.

What's Working in Mecklenburg

Mecklenburg County Public Health supports breastfeeding and safe infant sleep initiatives as part of a community-wide effort to reduce infant deaths.[1] Community partners such as Care Ring work with expectant mothers to close gaps in access to care.[2]

Smart Start of Mecklenburg County supports families so every child can turn five healthy and ready to thrive.

How You Can Help

- **Share safe sleep basics.** Help new parents and caregivers learn how to reduce the risk of sudden infant death.
- **Connect families to care.** Encourage expectant parents to start prenatal care early and keep well-child visits.
- **Listen to mothers.** Support efforts that center the experiences of Black mothers and families.
- **Tell your story.** Share your family's experience with community leaders and health partners.

Advocacy tools:
smartstartofmeck.org/advocacy

Support our work:
smartstartofmeck.org/donate

Sources 1. Mecklenburg County Public Health, *2025 Infant Mortality Report*. **2.** WSOC-TV, "Mecklenburg County sees five-year low in infant mortality rate" (2026). **3.** QCity Metro, "Mecklenburg County infant mortality rate race disparity" (Mar. 2026).

Smart Start of Mecklenburg County is a nonpartisan nonprofit. This brief is provided for public education and does not endorse candidates or take positions on specific legislation.

601 E. 5th Street, Suite 200, Charlotte, NC 28202 · 704.377.6588 · info@smartstartofmeck.org