



**Riverside County
Public Health**

Susan Harrington, M.S., R.D., Director

Dr. Cameron Kaiser, M.D., Public Health Officer

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Contacts:

Jose Arballo Jr., Senior Public Information Specialist

Department of Public Health

Office: 951-358-5599 Cell: 951-712-3705

Email: jarballo@rivcocha.org

New program seeks to improve health of African-American infants in Riverside County

Later this week, a group of pregnant African-American women will gather in Moreno Valley and discuss a variety of subjects, everything from dealing with the normal stresses of life, to finding ways to improve their life skills – all in the name of helping their unborn babies.

The women are part of the first group taking part in the Black Infant Health Program operated by the Riverside County Department of Public Health.

“There is such a need for this type of program,” said Hermia Parks, Director for Public Health Nursing and Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health. “We are trying to reduce the health gap that exists between black infants who are born here and those of other ethnic groups.”

The free program is designed to help pregnant African-American women improve the health of their unborn children, increase birth weights and help reduce the mortality rates for African-American children. The program will be operated in Moreno Valley, Riverside, Hemet and Perris, although participants do not have to live in those cities.

In Riverside County, African-American infants are 67 percent more likely to be born underweight (less than 5.5 pounds) than those of other races. The infant mortality rate for African-American infants (death within the first year) is nearly three times higher in comparison to other ethnic groups in Riverside County. The county’s figures mirror those nationally and statewide.

Participants will attend 20 group sessions – 10 during pregnancy and 10 after giving birth – and receive a health and developmental assessment, along with a mental health assessment as they enter the program. Some of the topics to be discussed include self-care and empowerment, stress management, breastfeeding and healthy nutrition.

Parks said the group-based approach gives the participants a way to manage stress, which is believed to be one of the factors behind the health gap, and learn the life skills that will help them be a better parent and guide them through the pregnancy.

Participants can be up to 26 weeks into their pregnancy to take part in the program and must be 18 years of age. To apply, call 951-210-1385.