

Nurse Family Partnership Helps First-Time Mothers For Free

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Within just over the past decade, the city's infant mortality rate has dropped by more than half. While the Department of Health reports a rate lower than the national average, major disparities among racial and ethnic groups in the city's poorest neighborhoods continue. In the following report, NY1's Kafi Drexel has more on a program dedicated to turning things around.

Little Camilla is in just the first two months of her life. Her mom, 18-year-old Elvira Gonzalez, says she would not have known how to take care of her had it not been for nurse Carmen Soto.

“I wouldn't know because I never went through the experience, and she taught me step-by-step what to do, how would things go what things will happen,” she says.

As part of the Nurse Family Partnership, nurse Soto has been with Elvira every step of the way throughout her pregnancy and until now. Normally, a city-run home visiting program for low-income, first-time moms, they met in the nurse's office for the benefit of the camera.

The free program addresses everything from the mom's health during pregnancy to learning how to be a parent.

“You have to really, really have patience with the child. You have to make sure you raise them in a proper way,” says first time mother Stephanie Peterson. “I was nervous about how to raise my child because there was nobody there to teach me. So when I found out I was pregnant it was a whole lot of things going on in my mind.”

City health officials are counting on the Nurse Family Partnership as one of their strategies to get rid of what they call some unacceptable statistics. In neighborhoods like East Jamaica, Queens, and Brownsville, Brooklyn, infant mortality rates are almost twice as high as the city average.

The latest statistics also show black babies are more than twice as likely to die in their first year of life as white babies, and Puerto Rican babies are about one and a half times as likely to die.

“A major reason we are seeing this is because infant mortality is so affected by factors such as poverty, such as the available housing, the quality of housing, the environment that people live in, accessibility to high quality, good services in terms of health care,” says DOH Assistant Commissioner Deborah Kaplan.

But she says the Nurse Family Partnership, where nurses meet with first-time moms

every one to two weeks, sometimes even taking them on doctor visits, is working.

“We’ve found marked decreases in rates of child abuse, decreases in moms having children soon after the first child, moms waiting until at least two years after their first child, moms getting off welfare, moms getting into employment,” says Kaplan.

In addition to East Jamaica, Queens, the Nurse Family Partnership is also running in East and Central Harlem and central Brooklyn, with enrollment planned for the South Bronx starting in 2006.

Any woman who is pregnant with her first baby, lives in certain zip codes and meets low-income requirements can enroll.

For more information, just call 311 and ask for the Nurse Family Partnership.