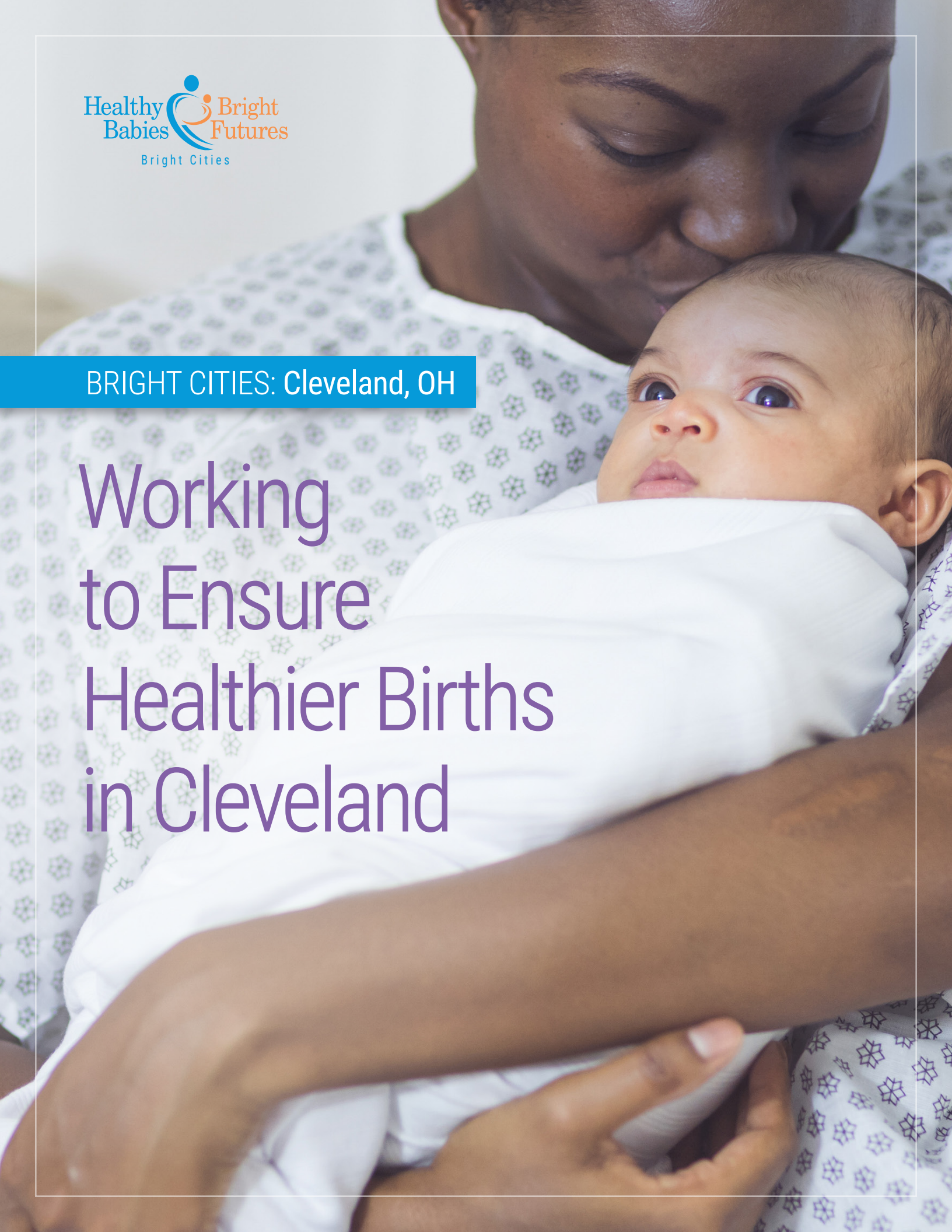


BRIGHT CITIES: Cleveland, OH



Working
to Ensure
Healthier Births
in Cleveland

First Year Cleveland Works with Community Members to Reduce Toxic Lead and Tobacco Smoke Exposure

Every baby deserves to celebrate a first birthday. In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, too many babies don't get that chance.

In 2019, of the 13,937 babies born in Cuyahoga County, 120 did not celebrate a first birthday, with Black babies dying at a rate four times higher compared to white babies.



Because of bias in health systems, a Black woman—who is highly educated and compliant with prenatal care—is more likely to have her infant die than a white woman with no high school degree and poor to no prenatal care. Other factors impacting maternal and infant health include differences in housing status and access to food, transportation, and culturally relevant health education.

In Cuyahoga County, which includes the City of Cleveland, Black infant deaths are extremely alarming, with a Black infant

BRIGHT CITY: CLEVELAND, OH

CONCERNS:

- Black infant mortality dramatically higher than white infant mortality
- Community lead exposures, primarily from old paint
- Need for smoking cessation outreach targeted to pregnant women

PROJECT OUTPUT:

- Outreach about the impact of neurotoxic exposures on infant morbidity and mortality
- Home visits to expectant families to promote smoking cessation
- “Pushed” group prenatal care models to include information about preventing lead exposure
- Served 1,388 families January 2020 to September 2021

KIDS POTENTIALLY IMPACTED:

- More than 24,000 kids under 5 years old live in Cleveland

Healthy Babies Bright Futures' Bright Cities Program works with Cities to Protect Babies' Brain Development

The Bright Cities program gives grants up to \$35,000 to city governments and community-based partners to equitably reduce their community's exposures to neurotoxic chemicals that interfere with all babies' brain development.

Why? 1 in 6 children in America have a neurological disability including autism, IQ loss, learning or behavioral problems, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and speech or cognitive delays.¹ While toxic chemicals are not the sole cause for lifelong learning and developmental deficits, they are among the most preventable.

Bright Cities works with mayors and city leaders to design the most effective strategies for a city. Benefits to being a Bright City extend beyond reducing neurotoxic exposures. Being a Bright City elicits positive responses from city residents. It provides an opportunity to leverage national funding and set the stage for sustainable equitable change. And it provides a fresh opportunity for cities to ensure that all babies have equitable, just and healthy environments.

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mortality rate (IMR) of **14.80**, compared to a white IMR of 3.53 (2020). The infant mortality rate is the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births and is a key indicator of the overall health of a region.

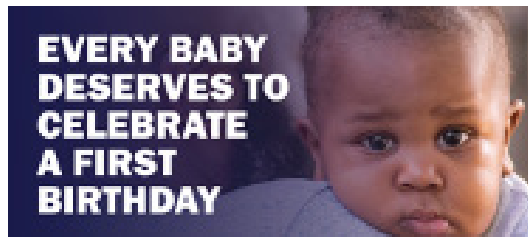
In other words, **in Cuyahoga County, for every white baby that died before their first birthday in 2020, four Black babies died.**

There is something about being Black in America over time, perhaps generations, that leads to worse birth outcomes for Black infants, according to Dr. Heather Burris at the University of Pennsylvania.² Black infants are at a 50% higher risk of being born preterm (before 37 weeks of gestation), almost twice as likely to be born with a low birth weight (LBW, less than 2,500 grams), and more than twice as likely to die in the first year of life.

Despite all the effort and resources that have been expended to discover the reasons for poor birth outcomes and disparities, many are linked to seemingly unrelated problems. [Read more about how environmental exposures](#)—including neurotoxic chemicals—can impact preterm birth and infant mortality.

What is First Year Cleveland (FYC)?

Community leaders established [First Year Cleveland \(FYC\)](#) in 2015 to help ensure that all babies celebrate their first birthdays. Today, FYC brings together expectant parents, new parents, parents who experienced pregnancy and infant loss, community leaders, philanthropic organizations, government and business entities, health care providers, educational institutions, nonprofits and the faith-based community to achieve the systems and social changes necessary for equitable birth outcomes.



FYC partnered with Bright Cities to help reduce exposures to lead and tobacco smoke in expectant mothers and babies living in Cuyahoga County.

Reducing exposures to lead and supporting use of programs to reduce tobacco use have the potential to impact premature birth and infant mortality rates in Cuyahoga County. And, both lead and tobacco smoke are [toxic environmental chemicals](#) linked to neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder, attention deficits, hyperactivity, intellectual disability and learning disorders.



“Establishing new partnerships and raising awareness on key factors that affect maternal and infant health outcomes is critically important to the work of First Year Cleveland. Through our partnership with Bright Cities, we are strengthening our efforts to inform expectant and new parents of the effects of neurotoxic exposures. We will continue to shed light on this important issue to ensure our babies have an opportunity to survive and thrive beyond the first year of life.”

– Katrice Cain, First Year Cleveland’s Interim Executive Director

Building Health Equity for Black Communities

FYC focused on the significant and unequal exposures to environmental toxins and chemicals experienced by Black communities and raised community awareness using three strategies.

Outreach about the impact of neurotoxic exposures on infant morbidity and mortality

Diverse partners—from health care, social services, community organizations, advocates, parents and policymakers—reviewed studies on the impact of neurotoxic chemicals on infant mortality. [Read them here](#). This information was shared with nine entities coordinating infant mortality reduction programs in Ohio (through the Ohio Department of Medicaid) and with the broader community via social media and e-newsletters.

Home visits to expectant families to promote smoking cessation and educate about safe sleep practices

Home visitors were provided with conversation starters—developed by [Cleveland’s Department of Public Health MomsFirst](#)—to help engage families in discussion about [smoking cessation](#). Safe Sleep educators expanded the ABCs of Safe Sleep (Alone, Back, Crib) to include “D” which stands for “Don’t Smoke.” Conversations with both families and community members include the ways second-hand and third-hand smoke affects infants and [direct service provision](#).



“Cleveland has historically had a high number of children with elevated blood lead levels. Because lead poisoning is detrimental to a child’s health and development, MomsFirst (FYC partner) provides parent education on lead poisoning prevention to ensure our families are educated about the risks and can reduce or eliminate their child’s exposure. Our goal is to ensure every child is born into a healthy environment and the educational materials provided by First Year Cleveland are another tool we can use in this effort.”

– Lisa Matthews, MomsFirst Project Director

“Pushed” group prenatal care models to include information about preventing neurotoxic exposures

One of FYC’s key practices is working with expectant mothers using a group prenatal care model. For example, the CenteringPregnancy® program brings expectant mothers into groups for prenatal care, based on estimated dates of delivery. Local CenteringPregnancy® providers and home visiting programs such as MomsFirst were provided information on lead exposure prevention by FYC to share with pregnant mothers, in addition to the CenteringPregnancy® curriculum.

FROM OUR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

“There is a wealth of information that I wasn’t aware of about lead. I also enjoyed the Healthy Diet portion which gave me ideas about meal planning.”

“I never knew something invisible could be so devastating.”

“The lead information was useful. I already started using the prevention tips around my house. I told my mother and sisters about it. My [community health worker] said that she will give me packets for them so they can have their own.”

“I’m glad that I know the facts about lead, and how harmful it can be for me, and my children. I always question the status of lead in any housing unit that I am interested in.”

FYC curated actionable steps to reduce lead—[Healthy Moms and Healthy Babies: Creating a Lead-Free Community](#)—and [other neurotoxic exposures](#). These resources were shared with the Centering® Healthcare Institute (CHI) along with a formal request for CHI to include information on the impact of environmental exposure to chemicals and toxins on maternal and infant health outcomes in future revisions to the CenteringPregnancy® curriculum.



PLAYBOOK TO INTEGRATE NEUROTOXIC EXPOSURE REDUCTIONS INTO STRATEGIC PLANS TO REDUCE DISPARITIES IN INFANT MORTALITY

1

Create a coalition with health care providers, academics, community advocates, and families most affected by infant mortality and premature births.

Prioritize the recruitment and inclusion of those most impacted. Ensure all equal partners in decision-making and develop processes that build relationships and trust.

2

Engage and understand evidence behind the relationship of exposure to toxins and poor birth outcomes and center equity.

Partner with experts and local organizations specializing in specific areas—like toxic lead exposure—to bring greater understanding of the social determinants of health that impact poor birth outcomes in the community.

3

Ask coalition members to share their experiences and make these lived experiences part of your curriculum.

Intentional and authentic listening helps to identify successful strategies and those not being well-received and keeps resources directed to high-impact, community-led interventions.

4

Share information about the relationship of exposure to toxins and poor birth outcomes with the community.

Use diverse communication strategies to foster learning across all stakeholders. Knowledge can be shared by community leaders and those directly impacted by poor birth outcomes and/or by community-based providers who have developed trusting relationships with families (e.g., via group prenatal care).

Have questions about Cleveland's actions?

Contact Katrice Cane, First Year Cleveland's Interim Executive Director,
at Katrice.D.Cain@case.edu

Curious about funding and/or informational resources?

Contact Kyra Naumoff Shields, Bright Cities Program Director, at
knaumoff@hbbf.org



The Bright Cities program provides grant funding for US cities and community based partner organizations to reduce exposures — in pregnant women and children under 2 years — to the nine neurotoxins with the strongest associations to developmental delay.¹ These neurotoxins are arsenic, flame retardants, lead, mercury, combustion byproducts called PAHs, banned industrial chemicals PCBs, organophosphate pesticides, a rocket fuel component and fertilizer contaminant called perchlorate, and plastic additives called phthalates.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bennett D, Bellinger DC, Birnbaum LS, et al. Project TENDR: Targeting Environmental Neuro-Developmental Risks The TENDR Consensus Statement. *Environ Health Perspect.* 2016; 124(7):A118-A122.
- 2 Burriss HH, Hacker MR. Birth outcome racial disparities: A result of intersecting social and environmental factors. *Semin Perinatol.* 2017 Oct;41(6):360-366.