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Five Iowa Moms Launch “Count the Kicks” Campaign to Prevent Late-Term Birth Complications and Stillbirth

(DES MOINES, Iowa – June 1, 2009) On June 4th, five Des Moines-area moms, who each lost babies to late-term stillbirth or infant death, will launch **Count The Kicks**, a statewide public health campaign developed to prevent late-term birth complications and stillbirths in Iowa.

Through whimsically-designed brochures, posters and radio PSAs, **Count the Kicks** teaches expectant parents how to track their baby’s movement patterns daily during the third trimester of pregnancy. The campaign urges parents to contact their health care providers immediately if they notice significant changes in their babies’ movements.

“Most expectant parents know that movement is an indicator of their baby’s well-being in utero, but the type of movement and how often the baby should move is often left open for interpretation,” says Kerry Biondi-Morlan, one of the moms responsible for the campaign. “Some think that movement should slow down as the due date approaches because the baby runs out of room, but that isn’t necessarily the case. Each baby is different and so are their movements.”

Scientific studies indicate kick counting, a daily record of a baby’s movements (kicks, rolls, punches, jabs) during the third trimester, is an easy, free and reliable way to monitor a baby’s well-being in addition to regular prenatal visits. Counting kicks is recommended by the American College Of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

The five Iowa women who created the **Count The Kicks** campaign want to ensure all Iowa parents have access to this potentially life-saving information.

Their campaign, which began with radio PSAs featuring First Lady Mari Culver and UI football coach Kirk Ferentz, has already had lifesaving success. A mother in the northwest Iowa area started counting the kicks after learning about its importance through the radio PSAs and a magazine article. When she noticed her baby’s reduced movement, she contacted her medical provider. Her baby was delivered immediately by emergency c-section where they discovered the umbilical cord was wrapped around his neck four times. Her physician believes kick counting was responsible for his healthy birth.

“There are not too many campaigns or community projects that actually have such an immediate potential to truly save lives, but in my medical opinion, this one does,” said Neil Mandsager, MD, perinatologist and Medical Director of the Perinatal Center of Iowa.

Count the Kicks is just one of the many projects this group of Iowa moms has started through the nonprofit organization they founded, called Healthy Birth Day.

Biondi-Morlan, Kate Safris, Rep. Janet Petersen, Tiffan Yamen and Jan Sapp Caruthers met soon after their losses. They were inspired to make Iowa ‘the safest place in the nation to have a baby’ after learning the startling fact that one out of every 150 pregnancies in the United States ends in stillbirth.

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In 2004, these moms helped get Iowa's Stillbirth Registry law enacted, which has brought more than \$1.3 million into Iowa for stillbirth prevention research. They created a parent-to-parent network in central Iowa to reach out to grieving families immediately following their loss of their babies. The group also speaks at medical seminars on how to effectively care for grieving parents.

The group began working on **Count the Kicks** after learning that Norway had dramatically reduced its stillbirth rates by conducting a public health campaign on kick counting.

"Research has proven the value of taking folic acid during pregnancy to prevent neurotube defects and putting babies 'back to sleep' to prevent SIDS," explains Yamen. "We know counting the kicks can save lives too. Our hope is that **Count The Kicks** will become as well known and followed by expectant parents as taking prenatal vitamins or putting their babies 'back to sleep.'"

Free **Count the Kicks** educational materials – including brochures, posters and kick track cards – are available for all maternal health care providers in Iowa by ordering online at www.countthekicks.org. Expectant parents can also learn how to count the kicks and download free kick count charts at www.countthekicks.org.

A fundraiser and kick off party benefiting Healthy Birth Day and the **Count The Kicks** campaign will be held on Thursday, June 4 at 7 p.m. at Gateway Market West in West Des Moines. Iowa's First Lady Mari Culver and the Healthy Birth Day founders will speak at 8 p.m.

Stillbirth Facts

- According to the World Health Organization, 4.5 million stillbirths occur each year worldwide; meaning 12,000 women deliver a stillborn each day.
- The National Institute of Health estimates that of the 4 million births a year in the U.S., there are 26,000 stillbirths; meaning 70 American women deliver a stillborn each day.
- Overall, one in every 150 births results in a stillborn. The lack of a consistent standard of reporting suggests that this number may actually be even higher.
- African-American women have more than twice the risk of stillbirth than that of white women. African-American women 35 years and older have a risk of stillbirth 4-5 times higher than the national average.
- 60% of fetal deaths happen after 28 weeks gestation. The majority of stillbirths occur at or near full term.
- Many stillbirths at term happen in otherwise healthy, low-risk pregnancies.
- Stillbirth is the least talked about pregnancy complication.

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