

# Effort under way to reestablish infant mortality panel in V.I.

By **JOY BLACKBURN**  
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ST. THOMAS — Babies who are born too soon run a higher risk of dying in infancy — and also are at greater risk for some long-term, chronic health problems.

On Monday, health workers and members of a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health of families in the Virgin Islands launched a new effort to collect and analyze data on the causes of and factors that contribute to pre-term labor and infant mortality in the territory.

“We as a community need to be ready to deal with this. It’s a community issue,” said Barbara Lee Jackson, executive director of Virgin Islands Perinatal Inc., a nonprofit group that sponsors health initiatives and outreach to help high-risk families and pregnant women. “We as an organization cannot do this alone.”

V.I. Perinatal invited representatives of the hospitals, the V.I. Health Department, community clinics and Miracle Babies Foundation to a meeting Monday to get their thoughts on the feasibility of

reestablishing an infant mortality review panel.

About 10 years ago, the Health Department set up an infant mortality review panel that issued an infant mortality report in 1997.

Since that time, nothing similar has been done, Jackson said. V.I. Perinatal hopes to establish a similar committee, collaborating with all of the agencies that deal with women’s and children’s health.

Collecting and analyzing the available data will help those working in the field to know where they should target their efforts to improve outcomes for high-risk mothers and infants, Jackson said.

While the Health Department keeps birth and death records and at least one neonatologist keeps more detailed records on neonatal mortality among babies born at Schneider Hospital, Jackson said the study is needed.

“It will kind of frame the response that we as a community make,” she said.

The territory’s infant mortality rate is actually lower than the national average — one of the few indicators in the annual V.I. Kids Count Study that compares favorably with the nation as a whole.

Data from 2003 showed an infant mortality rate of 5.3 per 1,000 live births in the territory. Nationwide, the rate was 7.1.

But it was not always that way.

The report the Health Department issued in 1997 showed that the previous year’s infant mortality rate was 10.5 per 1,000 — and that it had been much higher in previous years.

Dr. Beverly Banks-Randall, a neonatologist at Schneider Hospital, said at the meeting that the lower mortality rates are the result of a concerted effort to improve care.

Those who attended the meeting discussed obtaining data from the Health Department and also collecting their own data from chart audits at the hospitals. Jackson said she hopes the review — a collaborative effort — will be under way by the end of the year.

“I think it’s an excellent undertaking. I really hope that we can get some good information. I think it’s a challenge where we can get everyone involved,” Banks-Randall said.

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# 17-year-old slain by car is identified

By **JOSEPH TSIDULK**  
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ST. THOMAS — Police closed the name of the young man shot dead by an off-duty police officer last night during a Hospital operation as a 17-year-old resident.

Police said Kenrique was fatally shot in the chest by Officer Kendra who was working under a stolen goods buy.

According to police, he approached the rear of an unmarked vehicle, parked at Roberts Stadium, and put the undercover officer to rest at 8 p.m. on Thursday.