



Infant Mortality and Fatherhood

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24 million children, 1 out of 3, live without their biological father in the home.

A father's involvement before his child is born plays an important role in preventing death during the first year of life.

Infants with absent fathers are more likely to be born with lower birth weights, to be preterm and to be small for gestational age.

Regardless of race or ethnicity, the neonatal death rate of father-absent infants is nearly four times that of their counterparts with involved fathers.

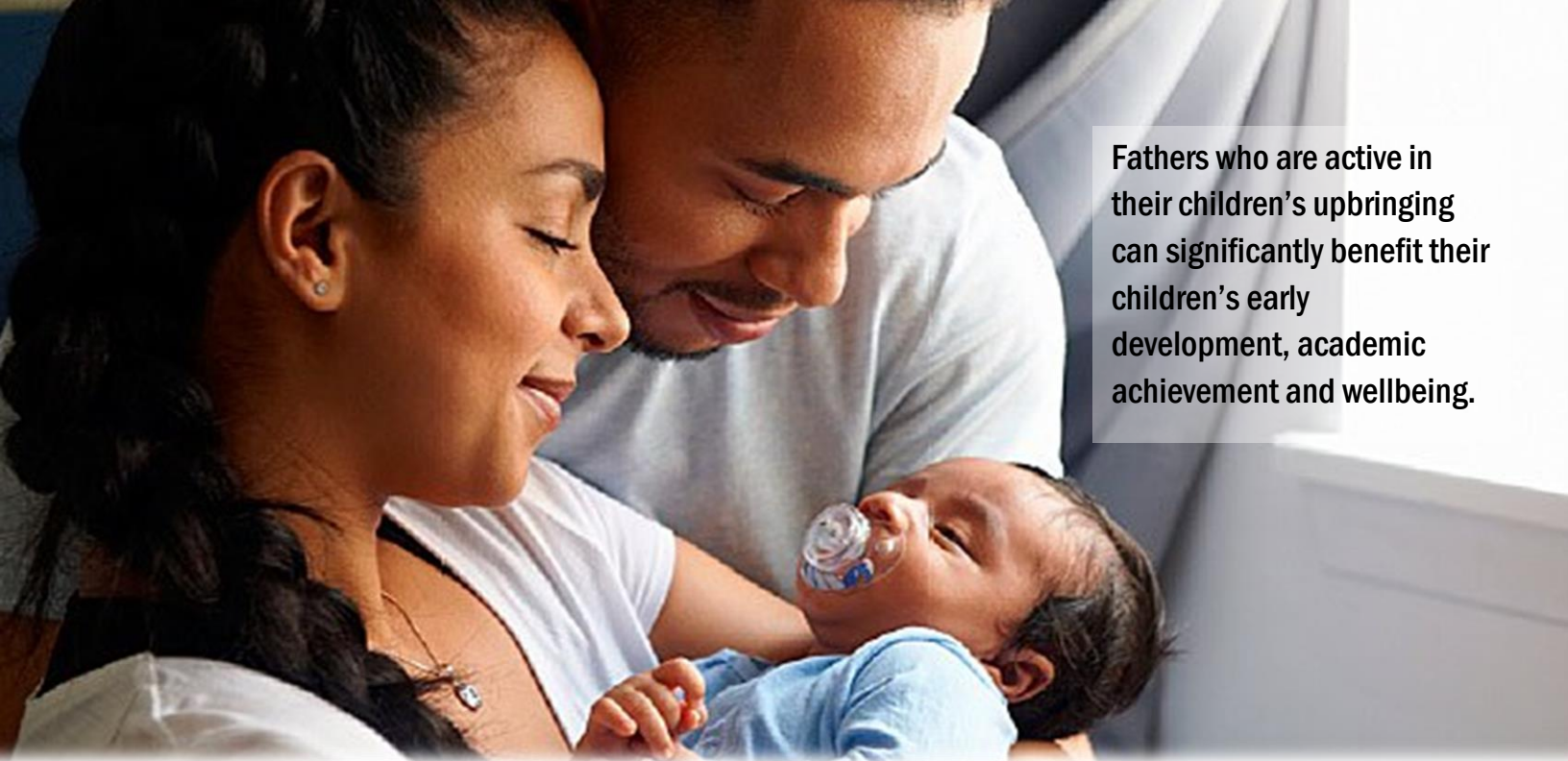
The risk of poor birth outcomes was highest for infants born to African American women whose babies' fathers are absent during their pregnancies. Even after adjusting for socioeconomic differences, these babies are seven (7) times more likely to die in infancy than babies born to Hispanic and Caucasian women in the same situation.

Obstetric complications contributing to premature births, such as anemia, chronic high blood pressure, eclampsia and placental abruption, are more prevalent among women whose babies' fathers are absent during pregnancy.

Expectant mothers in the father-absent group tend to be younger, more likely to never have given birth, more likely to be African American, and have a higher percentage of risk factors like smoking and inadequate prenatal care than mothers in the father-involved group.

Source: University of South Florida (2016). *Father's Involvement Tied to Infant Mortality Rate*. Retrieved from <http://news.usf.edu/article/templates/?a=2436>





Fathers who are active in their children's upbringing can significantly benefit their children's early development, academic achievement and wellbeing.

Dads can help in a variety of ways. They can:

- Accompany moms to prenatal visits and ultrasound appointments.
- Help plan for the baby by talking with your partner about what you both want for your baby.
- Go to classes that will teach you and your partner about childbirth.
- Help your partner stay healthy during pregnancy by encouraging her to eat many different foods.
- Join in and reinforce healthy habits such as preparing nutritious meals, exercising, avoiding tobacco, drugs, and alcohol.
- Make sure your partner stays away from dangerous household products, like strong cleansers, paint products, and insecticides.
- Exercise during pregnancy. Walk or swim together. Both are safe exercises and provide time together.
- Ensure your partner gets enough rest. Encourage her to use relaxation exercises and join in. Stress can be very harmful to both mother and baby.
- Understand the different changes both you and your partner are going through as you prepare for parenthood.
- Support your partner's choice on how to feed the baby. Breast milk is best for the baby. If mom chooses bottle feeding, you can often take over the feeding of the baby and give mom a rest.
- To bond with your baby, take time to learn about the developmental stages and how nutrition, lifestyles, and stress can affect prenatal growth. Listen to your child's heartbeat, feel the kicks.
- Find an infant massage class and attend with your partner. Infant massage is a wonderful way to soothe a baby.
- Learn how to bathe, feed, diaper, hold, and comfort a baby. All of these activities will build a father's confidence and enhance bonding with the child.