**Technical Notes for Birth and Pregnancy Data**

**Race and Ethnicity Considerations:**

The terms *white, nonwhite, other races and minority* are used to designate racial status. The term *Hispanic* denotes ethnicity. Hispanics can be of any race and therefore are included in the denominator for both white and other races (minority/nonwhite) categories. However, in Mecklenburg County, the majority of Hispanics fall into the white racial category, therefore, if only 2 population categories, white and non-white, are available, it is erroneous to assume the non-white rates are heavily influenced by Hispanics.

In order to best compare Hispanics to other races, it is necessary to sort out the Non-Hispanic groups whether they are White, Black, Asian, American-Indian or of another Non-White race. As a result, comparisons should be made between Hispanic rates and non-Hispanic rates (i.e. White Non-Hispanic pregnancies compared to Black Non-Hispanic pregnancies compared to Hispanic pregnancies) if this type of data is available. Such comparisons in Mecklenburg County cannot be made for birth and/or pregnancy (births + abortions + fetal deaths) rates because the North Carolina State Demographer only estimates population numbers for total, White, and Non-White (also termed Other Races or Minorities) race categories, making population numbers for Hispanic and Non-Hispanic populations unavailable and the calculation of race/ethnic-specific rates impossible in Mecklenburg County.

Instead, the number or percentage of the total births and/or pregnancies between Hispanics and Non-Hispanic groups is compared because race and ethnicity are available as separate variables within these databases. Unfortunately in Mecklenburg County, comparisons of Non-Hispanic groups with Hispanic groups cannot be made to the same degree when comparing births to pregnancies because the variable race is not coded the same way in the abortion data as it is in the birth and fetal death data. Therefore when examining pregnancy data by race and ethnicity, White Non-Hispanics and Black Non-Hispanics compared to Hispanics are used more often due to larger numbers for these race groups. All other race categories are summarized as Other Non-White Non-Hispanic and only included when appropriate for the data being analyzed.

**Pregnancies:**

*Total Pregnancies* represent the sum of all induced abortions, live births, and fetal deaths 20 or more weeks of gestation reported in the state of North Carolina. *Not included are spontaneous fetal deaths (still births) occurring less than 20 weeks of gestation that are not reportable to the state.*
Live Birth – the birth of a live born infant.

Abortion – The premature termination of a pregnancy, resulting in or caused by death of the fetus or embryo. Two types are considered in the context of public health reporting:

1. **Induced Abortion**: The purposeful interruption of pregnancy with the intention other than to produce a live born infant or to remove a dead fetus and which does not result in a live birth. In 1967, abortion became available on demand in NC with the condition it be performed by a licensed physician in a hospital or licensed abortion clinic.

2. **Spontaneous Abortion**: An interruption of pregnancy for some reason other than human choice, i.e., a miscarriage or stillbirth. Spontaneous abortions less than 20 weeks gestation are not reportable in NC.

Fetal Death – Stillbirths or an infant born 20 or more weeks gestation that is reported to the state of North Carolina.

Data Limitations and Caution of Interpretation of Rates:

Rates based on less than 20 events (i.e. number of pregnancies) are statistically unstable and should be interpreted with caution.

Given the Race and Ethnicity Considerations listed above, caution should be used in interpreting rates for White vs. Non-White race categories in Mecklenburg County due to Hispanics being included in both. In other words the pregnancy rates for Whites does not just represent pregnancies among White females but also Hispanic females whose race was designated as White.

Source: NC DHHS/SCHS – Prepared by the Mecklenburg County Health Department, Epidemiology Program, April 2008.