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U.S. Chief Technology Officer Announces Launch of First Free Mobile Health Service for Pregnant Women, New Mothers

*Technology Companies, Health Professionals, and Federal, State, and Local Agencies
Combine Forces to Provide Free Health Information Via Text Messages*

Pregnant women and new mothers will be able to get health information delivered regularly to their mobile phones by text message at no charge under an innovative public service program being launched today by a coalition of mobile phone service providers, health professionals, and Federal, State, and Local agencies.

The new program, called text4baby, is a free mobile information service that provides timely health information to women from early pregnancy through their babies' first year. The service sends important health tips that are timed to the mother's stage of pregnancy or the baby's age.

The new service, announced by U.S. Chief Technology Officer Aneesh Chopra at a health technology conference in Washington, D.C., aims to use one of the most widely used technologies in America—the mobile phone—to promote maternal and child health. Information provided to moms through text4baby will help them take care of their health and give their babies the best possible start in life. Currently in the United States more than 500,000 babies – 1 in every 8 – are born prematurely and an estimated 28,000 children die before their first birthday, a rate among the highest in the industrialized world. Premature babies can face lifelong health and intellectual development problems.

“Text4baby is the first free mobile health service to be taken to scale in the United States,” said Aneesh Chopra, Chief Technology Officer for the U.S. Government. “We know that mobile phones hold tremendous potential to inform and empower individuals,” said Chopra. “Text4baby represents an extraordinary opportunity to expand the way we use our phones, to demonstrate the potential of mobile health technology, and make a real difference for moms and babies across the country.”

Chopra, who also serves as Associate Director for Technology within the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, introduced the new service in a keynote address at a joint session of the Health IT Summit for Government Leaders, the National Health Information Exchange Summit, and the Eighteenth National HIPAA Summit.

Medical expenses for babies born prematurely average about ten times those for babies born after a full-term pregnancy. All told, premature births cost the Nation tens of billions of dollars—at least \$26.2 billion in 2005, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Ninety percent of Americans have a mobile phone and texting is especially prevalent among women of childbearing age and minority populations, who face higher infant mortality rates.

“Getting connected to prenatal care and other services for a healthy pregnancy is a problem for a lot of women,” said Wanda Jones, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Text4baby provides pregnant women and new mothers with a new tool to obtain vital information that is critical to maternal and child health.”

Women who sign up for the service by texting BABY to 511411 (or BEBE for Spanish) receive three free SMS text messages each week timed to their due date or baby’s date of birth. The messages focus on topics critical to the health of moms and babies, including, nutrition, seasonal flu prevention and treatment, mental health issues, risks of tobacco use, oral health, immunization schedules, and safe sleep. Text4baby messages also connect women to public clinics and support services for prenatal and infant care.

Many U.S. government agencies are involved in the design, outreach, and evaluation of text4baby, and will serve women and babies who learn about their services through the program. These include the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Defense Military Health System, and the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Participating carriers include: Alltel, Assurance Wireless, AT&T, Boost Mobile, Cellular South, Cellcom, Centennial Cellular, Cincinnati Bell, Metro PCS, N-Telos, Sprint Nextel, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular, Verizon Wireless and Virgin Mobile USA.

Text4baby is an educational program of the National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition (HMHB), made possible through a public-private partnership that includes more than 100 entities. In addition to the Federal partners listed above, founding partners include HMHB, Voxiva, the CTIA Wireless Foundation, and Grey Health Group. Johnson & Johnson is the Founding Sponsor, and Premier Sponsors include WellPoint, Pfizer, and CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield. The mobile health platform is provided by Voxiva and free messaging services are provided by participating wireless service providers. Implementation partners include BabyCenter, Danya International, Syniverse, Keynote Systems and The George Washington University. Other text4baby partners include national health professional associations; national NGOs; state and local government coalitions from across the country; and MTV Networks.

For more information on text4baby, visit text4baby.org.

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