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# Ohio becomes 2nd state to offer free baby boxes to curb infant deaths

Updated March 11, 2017 at 9:30 AM; Posted March 10, 2017 at 3:45 PM

## baby box

Baby Box Co. partnered with Ohio hospitals, public health officials and nonprofits to give baby boxes to expecting parents statewide and better educate families about safe-sleep practices. *(Baby Box Co.)*

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- The idea: a free cardboard box where babies can sleep safely. The hope: to prevent infant deaths by giving baby boxes to every Ohio child born this year.

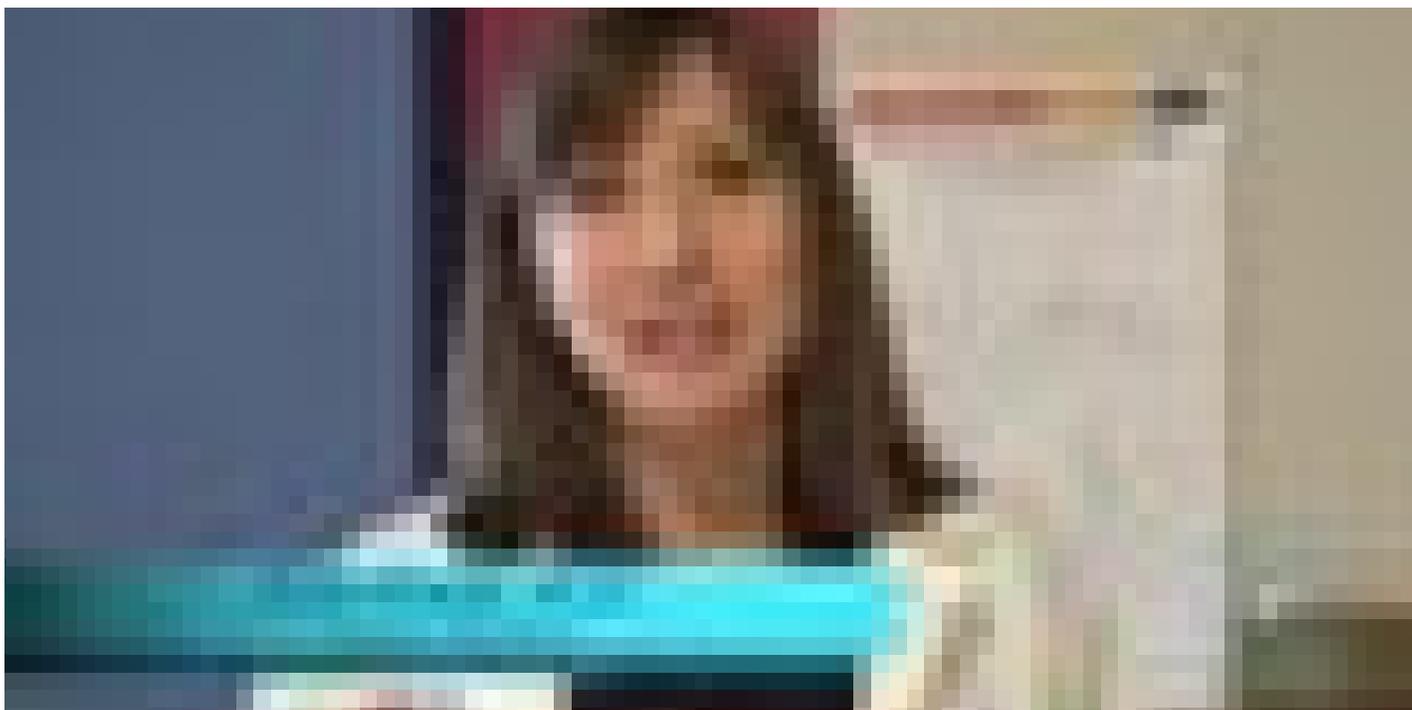
Parents in Finland have received [government-funded "baby boxes"](#) full of clothes and other essential baby items since the 1930s. The boxes, which contain a slim mattress, double as portable infant sleep surfaces.

Baby Box launched its first statewide program in January in [New Jersey](#).

Now California-based Baby Box Co. has teamed up with several Ohio hospitals and nonprofits to give away 140,000 cardboard boxes this year as a way to encourage prenatal education and reduce Ohio's [high infant mortality rate](#). More than 150 boxes were handed out Friday morning at University Hospital MacDonal Women's Hospital.

### [Infant mortality rate jumps in Ohio, Cuyahoga County, racial gap continues to widen](#)

All expecting parents living in Ohio are eligible to receive a free box after watching a 15-minute education course online and taking a quiz. University Hospitals staff members developed the materials, which teach about safe-sleep practices, prenatal care, labor and birth, breastfeeding and postpartum contraception.





[Cleveland - How to use your new Baby Box](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Boxes can be picked up or delivered at no cost. Each box contains diapers, wipes, breast pads and nipple cream, parent-child activity cards and other newborn essentials and is valued at about \$150.

"This is a little piece of love and hope we give them in a box to say we care about you, we care about your baby," said Celina Cunanan, director of midwifery services for University Hospitals and a founding member of Babies Need Boxes Ohio.

Cunanan said many women don't engage in prenatal care or education, and the educational videos add another layer of information in addition to pamphlets and in-hospital education.

### **What's the problem?**

Ohio has one of the highest rates of infant deaths in the United States. In 2015, 7.2 live-born babies died before their first birthdays per 1,000 live births. Nationally, the infant mortality rate is 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Most Ohio infant deaths are from pre-term causes, but the number of deaths from sleep-related causes increased in 2015.

The hope is Ohio can follow Finland's footsteps. The Scandinavian country reduced its infant mortality rate from 65 per 1,000 births in the 1930s to 2.5 per 1,000 births today, one of the lowest in the world.

Experts credit the improvement to the boxes, which require a prenatal visit and education, and a national health insurance program established in the 1960s.

### **Why bring the boxes to Ohio?**

The Ohio effort is a partnership with University Hospitals MacDonal Women's and Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospitals, the Cincinnati Health Department, Richland County Health Department, Muskingum Valley Health Centers, Babies Need Boxes Ohio and other community health organizations. Pampers, Lansinoh and other companies donated products for the boxes.

Baby Box Co. co-founder and CEO Jennifer Clary said the company brought the program to Ohio because of the large amount of local support and the state's disparate infant mortality rates.

In 2015, the gap between black and white infant deaths widened, and black babies are three times as likely to die before their age one than white babies.

When the Baby Box Co. began educational programs in targeted areas, they found the parents felt stigmatized and weren't as responsive. Clary said Finland's program is successful in part because all parents have the same opportunity to receive education and a desirable product.

"Whether in a baby box or a \$10,000 crib, they're equivalently safe if you do it right," Clary said. "This isn't about the product -- it's about giving parents equal access to basic education."

## How do parents get a box?

1. Register online at [babyboxuniveristy.com](http://babyboxuniveristy.com).
2. Watch the videos for the "Ohio Syllabus" on the website.
3. Take a short quiz and take the certificate of completion to a local pick-up location or have the box delivered to your home.

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