

Nurse program helps Durham mothers get started

By SAMIHA KHANNA
STAFF WRITER

DURHAM - Already raising two children, now ages 12 and 14, Latisha Dorsey might have seemed to be all set when it came to having another baby.

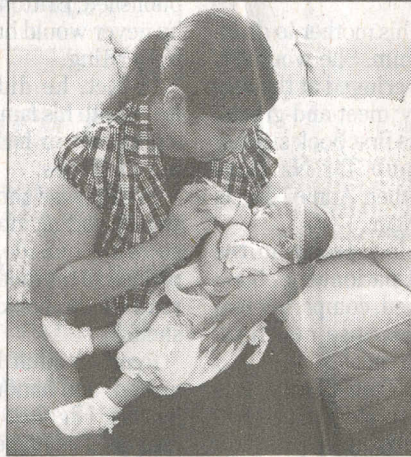
But Dorsey learned this summer when she gave birth to Antonio that a lot has changed since the last time she had a newborn at home.

You're supposed to put newborns on their backs, not their sides. An infant shouldn't be accompanied in his crib by blankets or even his cuddly teddy bear. And there are a lot more creative solutions to breast-feeding when you're out in public than there were 10 years ago, she learned.

"If you haven't had a baby in a while, you get out of touch with what's new," said Dorsey, 31, who works as a hospital nutritionist.

Dorsey said she was thankful for the updates, which came largely from a free visit to her home by a county health department nurse through the new Durham Connects program.

A project of the Duke University Center for Child & Family Policy, the county



health department and several other community groups, Durham Connects has been helping new mothers for about a month. Organizers formally introduced the program this month, though they're still hiring nurses to staff it.

"The idea is really to support new parents at a critical juncture in a child's life," said Jeannine Sato, an administrator for the program. "The early weeks and years of life are when their brain ar-

TO LEARN MORE
Durham Connects is now providing free home visits to answer questions, promote childhood well being and help parents get resources, such as parenting classes, mentoring, day care services or financial aid for Durham newborns.

To learn more, call 668-3279, send e-mail to info@durhamconnects.org or see www.durhamconnects.org.

New mother Elena Ramirez feeds her 2-month-old daughter at home in Durham.

STAFF PHOTO BY HARRY LYNCH

chitecture is developing, and it sets the foundation for their entire life."

The plan offers free nurse visits to any Durham resident who is taking home a newborn, Sato said. Through hospitals across the Triangle, the group contacts the parents and arrives at the home with a gift basket and loads of information about raising a baby.

The nurse does a physical check of the baby and its development and can offer

advice on everything from nutrition to how to comfort a crying infant. The nurse also can refer the parent to other programs for parenting classes, financial help, counseling or other needs.

In the case of Elena Ramirez, a 20-year-old first-time mother, the nurse helped outline a baby's development so Ramirez knows how to track her progress.

"It makes me feel good, because I already know how the baby's supposed to be acting," Ramirez said. "If I see anything different, I know to call" a doctor.

The program, which eventually will use 20 nurses, is funded primarily by the Duke Endowment, said Kenneth Dodge, director of the Center for Child & Family Policy. Salaries and other expenses are expected to run about \$2 million a year. Other groups provide in-kind donations of diapers, information, office space and supplies, he said.

Organizers are equipped to support all of the estimated 4,000 babies born to Durham residents each year and hope all new parents participate.

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