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Illinois DCFS kicks off Infant Safe Sleep Awareness Month in partnership with state agencies, hospitals, community groups and Pace Bus

CHICAGO, IL – The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), leading hospitals, community groups and Pace bus are joining forces to help prevent sleep related infant deaths in Chicago.



Representatives will hold a press conference at 10 a.m. today at Casa Central, 1335 N. California Ave., 3rd floor auditorium in Chicago to officially kick off Infant Safe Sleep Awareness Month, a statewide prevention and education campaign aimed at reducing the risk of sleep related infant deaths by providing essential information about the importance of creating a safe sleep environment to child caregivers and the general public. The goal this year is to maintain awareness throughout the year by partnering with community organizations and health care providers.

Unsafe sleep is a leading cause of death for children 1 year old and younger. In 2018, 143 infants in Illinois under the age of 1 died because of being put to sleep unsafely, including 61 in Cook County.

“Every week DCFS is notified of babies who have died from unsafe sleeping environments. These deaths are particularly tragic because they are preventable,” said Marc D. Smith, acting director of DCFS. “These are our children. All of us are responsible for making sure every parent across Illinois is aware of the danger to their child when they don’t create a safe sleeping environment.

DCFS is committed to partnering with everyone who shares our mission of protecting children to address this challenge.”

Of the 143 infant deaths in 2018, 114 were found in locations other than a crib, bassinet or pack and play; 102 were found in positions other than on their back; and 97 were co-sleeping with another individual at the time of death.

“IDHS has been working diligently with our collaborative partnerships to reduce infant morbidity and mortality throughout the state of Illinois,” said Franchesca Hammond, DNP, APRN, FNP-BC, bureau chief for the Bureau of Maternal & Child Health. “Supporting and fostering safe sleep practices to assess and reduce significant risk factors that contribute to SIDS and SUID remains a priority for IDHS. We will continue to work with our community partners to promote safe sleep education and broaden the awareness of the safe sleep campaign to impact the lives of parents and their infants.”

“IDPH recognizes that addressing safe sleep is a key way to address the health equity of our state, as black infants are about five times as likely to die from Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) than white infants, which is a leading cause of our infant mortality disparity,” said Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Director of IDPH “Increasing access to safe sleeping environments is critical to reducing this disparity and to lowering the risk of SUID.”

This year, to reach an even greater audience, Illinois DCFS is partnering with Pace to share safe sleep messages on busses visible to tens of thousands of daily riders across the Chicago suburbs.

“Pace’s priorities are simple – provide safe and reliable service for the communities we serve,” said Pace Board Chairman Richard Kwasneski. “Partnering with other agencies who work towards similar goals of community safety is our pleasure.”

The safe sleep message will appear on 730 buses operating across suburban Chicago until December 2020.

In addition, a “safe sleep crib” will be on display in the James R. Thompson Center lobby at 100 W. Randolph Street in Chicago between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. from Tuesday, October 15 through Friday, October 18.

About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Founded in 1964, DCFS is responsible for protecting children from abuse or neglect by responding to calls received on the Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). With the goal of keeping children safe, DCFS strengthens and supports families with a wide range of services. When keeping a child safe means removing them from the home, DCFS makes every effort to reunite them with their family. When the best interest of the child makes this impossible, DCFS is committed to pursuing adoption by loving families to provide children with a safe and permanent home. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.