Illinois DCFS promotes Safe Sleep Awareness Month in partnership with HSHS St. John's Hospital, Memorial Medical Center and the Sangamon County Department of Public Health

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), HSHS St. John's Hospital, Memorial Medical Center and the Sangamon County Department of Public Health are joining forces to help prevent sleep related infant deaths in central Illinois.

Representatives will hold a press conference at 10 a.m. today at the Sangamon County Health Department, 2833 South Grand Ave. East in Springfield to promote 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 public. The goal 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 one year old and younger. In 2018, 143 infants in Illinois under the age of 1 died because of being put to sleep unsafely, including 27 in the central Illinois region, which consists of 17 counties.

"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. We are all responsible for making sure every parent across Illinois is aware of the danger to their child when they do not create a safe sleeping environment. DCFS is committed to partnering with everyone who shares our mission of protecting children to address this challenge. By collaborating, our communication and outreach efforts to create awareness will have greater impact."

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.

Infant Mortality was identified as a top priority in the most recent Sangamon County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The CHNA is a collaboration between both hospitals and the Sangamon County Health Department. The issue rose to the top of the health priorities and the three organizations are working on a collaborative strategy to prevent accidental infant asphyxiation through safe sleep education.

"HSHS St. John's Women and Infants Center educates and demonstrates safe sleep practices for new parents and infant caregivers. We are committed to working diligently within the hospital and with community partners to make certain this message is heard and understood in the community," said Diedra Stewart, NICU Nurse Manager at HSHS St. John's Hospital.

"Too many babies are lost because of sleep-related deaths, many of which are preventable," said Susan McCarty, one of the nurse managers of Memorial Medical Center's maternity department, Family Maternity Suites. "We work together with the parents from the minute they're admitted to our unit until they go home about what they can do to promote safe sleep for their newborns."

"Sangamon County Department of Public Health staff is increasing our knowledge of safe sleeping for infants and will spread the information to all families whose lives we touch in our many programs and services," said Gail O'Neill, Director.

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.*

About HSHS St. John's Hospital
HSHS St. John's Hospital in Springfield, Illinois is a regional medical center offering a comprehensive array of health care services to central and southern Illinois. Founded in 1875, St. John's is the flagship hospital of Hospital Sisters Health System and is home to the Prairie Heart Institute, St. John's Children's Hospital, St. John's Women's Services, St. John's Neurosciences Institute, St. John's Cancer Center, orthopedic services and AthletiCare. St. John's now has one of the most advanced surgery centers in the nation and a renovated patient tower with all private rooms. St. John's is designated as a level I trauma center, has its own college of nursing and is a teaching hospital for the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. For more information about St. John's Hospital, visit www.st-johns.org.

About Memorial Medical Center
Memorial Medical Center, one of five hospitals in Memorial Health System, is an acute care Magnet hospital (for nursing excellence) in Springfield that offers comprehensive inpatient and outpatient services to residents of 40 central and southern Illinois counties. Since 1970, Memorial Medical has been a teaching hospital affiliated with Southern Illinois University School of Medicine.

About the Sangamon County Department of Public Health
The Sangamon County Department of Public Health is local health department certified by the Illinois Department of Public Health serving Sangamon and Menard Counties. Several programs serve as many as 10 Illinois counties. All programs are intended to help residents prevent disease and disability. A recent partnership with SIU School of Medicine has increased the opportunities for people to get primary medical and preventive care in one location. For more information visit www.scdph.org.

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