

Pat Quinn
Governor

Richard H. Calica
Director



Illinois Department of Children & Family Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, January 10, 2013

CONTACT: Dave Clarkin, Spokesperson
312-814-6847

DCFS: ILLINOIS CHILD DEATHS SKYROCKET IN 2012

Suffocation by neglect top cause of death in indicated neglect and abuse cases

SPRINGFIELD – Child deaths caused by neglect or abuse skyrocketed in 2012, according to end-of-year analysis by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Neglect or abuse was indicated in the deaths of 90 children in 2012, according to investigations already completed by DCFS, with more than 60 recently reported deaths still under investigation. Indicated child deaths occurred in equal numbers in Chicago, the suburbs, and downstate Illinois; 69 percent of victims never saw their first birthday.

Suffocation by neglect was the leading cause of death in 2012, involved in 40 indicated deaths (44 percent) caused by unsafe sleep conditions. Most deaths occurred when parents, ignoring the advice of the American Academy of Pediatrics and safety experts, slept with a newborn or infant in their bed, rolling over on the child in the night and smothering her or him. In other instances, parents ignored safety warnings and allowed a newborn or infant to sleep with a blanket, on an adult mattress or couch, or on their stomachs, suffocating the child. Although the deaths might have been accidental, Illinois law holds parents and other caretakers accountable for creating a substantial risk of injury to a child, and DCFS indicates perpetrators for neglect.

“The death of any child is heartbreaking, and even more so when that death may have been avoided if parents had just followed the warnings of their doctor,” said DCFS spokesperson Dave Clarkin. “We hope that other parents will learn from these losses and heed the warnings of experts.”

DCFS launched a public awareness campaign to educate parents of the risks of unsafe sleep in 2012, and the department hopes to expand those efforts in 2013. Clarkin says health care providers, particularly hospitals, pediatricians and nurses are leading advocates for the Safe Sleep Campaign, but others need to be engaged, and the message must be reinforced by friends, family and grandparents in particular.

(more)

“Most new moms rely on their own moms for advice, and we need grandmothers to reinforce the message that it is never okay to gamble with a child’s life by sleeping with them in your bed, or falling asleep with them in a chair or couch,” says Clarkin. “As family and friends plan baby showers to welcome new ones into the family, a safe crib or bassinet with no blankets or other dangers needs to be at the top of the shopping list.”

Family and friends must heed warning signs to curb homicidal deaths

Homicides, deaths resulting from intentional abuse and injury, were the second leading cause of indicated deaths reported to DCFS this year, claiming 22 lives. DCFS investigations uncovered evidence in many cases that those close to the family saw clear warning signs that were never reported to authorities, including previous physical abuse or neglect of the child, patterns of domestic violence, and use of drugs or heavy drinking while children were in their care. DCFS says family, friends and neighbors must do a better job of reporting suspected abuse or neglect to its toll-free hotline, 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873), to help reduce child deaths.

“Two-thirds of the reports to our hotline come from mandated reporters like prosecutors, police, hospital staff and teachers,” says Clarkin. “To protect kids, DCFS needs to be contacted for help before there is a 911 call, a child is in the emergency room or the abuse or neglect has been going on for years.”

The department implemented a reorganization plan January 2nd to add frontline staff handling abuse investigations and make other improvements to operations. That plan depends on the Illinois General Assembly restoring \$38,048,200 in cuts in state funding. A recent effort to restore \$25 million in funding fell short by one vote in a Senate committee. DCFS is urging lawmakers from both chambers and both sides of the aisle to restore its funding quickly after the new legislature is sworn in, averting layoffs of two-thirds of DCFS staff in March.

###

Division of Communications • Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
100 West Randolph, 6-200 • Chicago, Illinois 60601-3249
312-814-6847 • 312-814-8783 / TTY

