



JB Pritzker, Governor

Grace B. Hou, Secretary

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Illinois launches Safe Sleep Support program to address Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths

CHICAGO —The Pritzker administration announced today an expansive *Illinois Safe Sleep Support* program. The program, led by 12 government and community agencies, aims to address sudden unexpected infant death (SUID), one of the leading causes of infant mortality.

Illinois Safe Sleep Support will focus on outreach and education to expand community-based promotion of safe sleep practices, promote resources to improve safe sleep environments, identify SUID disparities, and address opportunities for improvement. The investments of this year-long campaign will continue to position Illinois as a leading state for children, families, and the early childhood workforce that supports them.

SUID is one of the leading causes of infant mortality in Illinois and the nation. The state lost 737 babies to infant death before their first birthday in 2020. While infant mortality rates are highest in Cook County, this is a statewide health concern.

“All Illinois families should be aware of the risks and ways to prevent crib deaths and keep their loved ones safe. This gives babies the best chance to thrive during their first year and beyond,” **said Governor Pritzker.**

“Informing parents about protective practices for babies drives down rates of mortality, plain and simple. The State is taking a multi-targeted approach, involving parents, community organizations, and medical and childcare professionals in this effort,” **said Grace B. Hou, Secretary, Illinois Department of Human Services.**

“As a pediatrician, I know infant mortality is an important indicator of the overall health of a community, and is a critical public health issue,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra.** “The Illinois Department of Public Health has committed funding to bring resources to communities and hospitals to educate parents and caregivers about how to prevent sleep related deaths, a leading cause of infant mortality disparities.

I applaud Governor Pritzker for making the Illinois Safe Sleep Support program a priority for his administration, and IDPH looks forward to working with our partners in state and local government and the state's health care systems to reduce our infant mortality rate."

"The City of Chicago is proudly partnering in this important campaign. Infant death is one of the primary drivers of the racial life expectancy gap among Chicago residents and many of these heartbreaking losses are preventable. We can change this. We are committed to empowering our families with the information, resources, and support that they need to keep their babies safe while sleeping," **said Dr. Allison Arwady, MD, MPH, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health**

Through Illinois Safe Sleep Support, the State is responding with concrete measures designed to ensure the health and safety of infants. Safe sleep education campaigns have been shown to significantly improve practices around sleep and infant care, which can reduce rates of infant mortality

SUID is a leading cause of death in babies aged one month to one year. These deaths often happen during sleep or in the baby's sleep area and are frequently caused by accidental suffocation.

"Two to three Illinois babies die every week from SUID. In Cook County, SUID occurs 16 times more often among Black infants, and nearly 4 times more often among Hispanic infants, as compared to white infants. The data in this report are from the Sudden Unexpected Infant Death-Case Registry (SUID-CR) system for Cook County, which is housed at Rush University Medical Center in close affiliation with the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office. The report provides details regarding these deaths based on thorough investigation, including infant death scene investigation and autopsy by the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, as well as categorization of the cause of death (e.g., Suffocation, Possible Suffocation or Undetermined with Unsafe Sleep Factors) that is determined using a CDC-defined process during multidisciplinary Child Death Review Team meetings," **said Dr. Kyran Quinlan, Principal Investigator for the CDC SUID Case Registry for Cook County.**

Although the quality of healthcare has improved in Illinois, racial disparities for infant mortality have remained a concern. Rates of SUID have remained steady since 2000 in the state, but rates are disproportionately higher for Black infants. In Cook County, SUID occurred 16 times more often in Black infants.

The Illinois Safe Sleep Support program aligns with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines which include placing infants on their backs to sleep and keeping soft items like pillows, blankets, and bumpers out of their sleep space. Together, these actions help prevent suffocation or strangulation.



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Today's announcement builds on and furthers the Governor's commitment and financial support to the early childhood system throughout the pandemic. In expanding access to resources and tools that secure maternal and child health, Illinois is tackling infant mortality across all communities. For more information on Illinois Safe Sleep Support program, visit InfantSafeSleep.Illinois.gov.

Illinois Safe Sleep Support was developed by the Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Public Health, and Chicago Department of Public Health in partnership with Cook County Health, Illinois Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics, Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois State Police, Rush University Medical Center, Sudden Infant Death Services (SIDS) of Illinois, and University of Illinois Chicago.

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