



## NEWS RELEASE

### ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Alabama receives more than \$47,000 from the Safe to Sleep® Campaign to improve infant sleep environments

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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More than 30 Alabama organizations will receive a combined total of \$47,000 from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to support their efforts to reduce the frequency of sleep related infant deaths in the state.

From 2012 to 2014, 303 infants died from sleep-related causes of infant death. These include death resulting from accidental suffocation or entrapment in bedding materials, overheating, and from so called sudden unexplained infant deaths (SUID), in which a cause of infant death could not be readily identified.

“We know that if a baby is always put to sleep on its back, the chance of that baby dying from SUID is reduced by 50 percent, said Amy Stratton, director of the Alabama Department of Public Health State Perinatal Program. We also know that infants who are exposed to secondhand smoke are at greater risk for SUID,” “This funding will provide the means to initiate projects, as well as educate and support families in providing the safest infant sleeping environments.”

Funding is being provided by the NIH *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The Alabama Department of Public Health - State Perinatal Program will be the lead agency in facilitating the “Alabama Safe Sleep Outreach Project”. Mini-grant awards ranging from \$500 up to \$2,000 have been awarded to faith-based institutions, fraternities/sororities, hospitals, non-profit groups, universities, and other community based groups to conduct a series of educational activities in local communities to demonstrate safe infant sleep practices, through workshops and outreach events to parents and caregivers.

In 2014 alone, there were 109 infants who died from sleep-related deaths before celebrating their first birthday according to data from the Center for Health Statistics. These 109 infants accounted for 21.1 percent of the total infant mortality rate in Alabama. The loss of these infants is equivalent to losing more than five kindergarten classrooms of students in the state.

Research indicates that sleep-related practices are strongly influenced by social, environmental and cultural norms. The data suggest that Alabama, like most southern states, experiences racial inequities that prevent some babies from having the best opportunity for a healthy start. The rate of sleep-related infant deaths to black and other infants is nearly twice that of white

infants.

Additionally, infants born to young mothers and to mothers with less than a high school education are more likely to experience sleep-related deaths. From 2011 to 2013, mothers with less than a high school education were seven times more likely to have an infant die due to a sleep-related cause than a mother with a college degree.

“Everyone who cares for babies has the responsibility to protect them,” Ms. Stratton said. “Engaging in safe sleep practices by placing infants on their backs in a safety-approved crib that is free of blankets, pillows, bumper pads, stuffed animals and toys, and in a smoke-free environment are the first steps. Working locally with the funded organizations to share the Safe to Sleep® campaign’s message is the next best way to improve sleep-related infant deaths in your community.”

For additional information and resources about safe sleep and the full list of mini-grant organizations, please visit: [adph.org/perinatal](http://adph.org/perinatal).