



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama receives \$50,000 from the Safe to Sleep® Campaign to improve infant sleep environments

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development recently awarded 28 Alabama organizations more than \$50,000 as part of its Safe to Sleep® Campaign. The campaign's outreach supports efforts to reduce the rate of sudden unexplained infant death (SUID) and other sleep-related infant deaths in the state.

In Alabama, 409 infants died from SUID and other sleep-related causes between 2011 and 2015. In 2015, 109 infants died from sleep-related deaths before celebrating their first birthday. These 109 infants accounted for 22 percent of the total infant mortality rate in Alabama. If the average kindergarten classroom had 20 students per class, the loss of infants to sleep-related deaths in 2015 would have been equivalent to the number of children in five kindergarten classrooms in Alabama.

The 28 organizations receiving mini-grant awards to conduct the "Alabama Safe Sleep Outreach Project" range from \$500 up to \$2,000 and include faith-based institutions, fraternities/sororities, hospitals, nonprofit groups, universities, and other community based groups. These organizations will conduct educational activities in local communities over the next six months by demonstrating safe infant sleep practices, conducting workshops, and holding outreach events.

"We know that if a baby is always put to sleep on his or her back, the chance of that baby dying from SUID is reduced by 50 percent. We also know that infants who are exposed to secondhand smoke are at greater risk for SUID," states Amy Stratton, director of the Alabama Department of Public Health State Perinatal Program. "This funding will enable communities with the resources to initiate projects to educate and support families in providing the safest infant sleeping environments."

Research indicates that sleep-related practices are strongly influenced by social, environmental and cultural norms. The data suggest that Alabama 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.

Safe sleep is not just the responsibility of the mother. Studies have shown that fathers are the most influential people in a mother's life, especially in the first few weeks after the birth of an infant. Educating men and fathers about safe sleep practices is another key strategy in providing effective outreach activities through these grants.

"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 one way to decrease unsafe 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