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NEWS RELEASE

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State notes risk of child deaths from sleeping rollovers during bedsharing

BATON ROUGE – A young couple’s first baby is the latest of 16 suspected bedsharing deaths in Louisiana this year.

In another recent case, bedsharing is suspected in the death of a month-old infant sleeping between his grandmother and a young sibling.

With only half the year gone and the three-quarter mark of last year’s sleeping rollover deaths already surpassed, the Office of Community Services (OCS) in the state Department of Social Services is suggesting parental caution with infant sleep environments.

OCS Assistant Secretary Marketa Garner-Gautreau said, “While the death of any child is tragic, a fatality resulting from bedsharing with an adult or another child is preventable.” She noted that many such deaths occur because the caregiver is under the influence of medication or other substances, although this was not believed to be a factor in the two deaths cited.

Infant bedsharing is the practice of allowing an infant to sleep with others, increasing the risk of accidental suffocation from sleeping rollovers or from bedding, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Dr. Gina Lagarde, medical director of the Child Health Program at the Office of Public Health in the state Department of Health and Hospitals, said, “The rule of thumb is: Share the room, not the bed. Babies who sleep in adult beds are at much greater risk of death, up to 40 times greater, than babies who sleep on their back in a safe crib.”

In contrast, sharing a room rather than a bed with a baby may be beneficial.

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Dr. Hosea Doucet, medical director of the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) Program at the Office of Public Health and professor at Tulane University Medical School, said, “In addition to facilitating breastfeeding, growing evidence indicates that room sharing without bedsharing may reduce the risk of SIDS.”

Of 79 child fatalities investigated last year by OCS in reports of abuse and/or neglect, 21 (or 26.5 percent) were suspected as sleeping rollover deaths caused by bedsharing. In seven additional cases, an unsafe sleeping arrangement was reported.

So far in 2007, OCS has investigated 59 child fatalities in reports of abuse and/or neglect where a child death or near-death occurred. Of these, 16 (or 27 percent) are suspected as sleeping rollover deaths. In three additional cases, an unsafe sleeping arrangement was reported.

The following are guidelines from the AAP Task Force on SIDS for creating a safe-sleep environment for baby:

- Provide a separate sleep surface for baby – such as crib, bassinet or cradle.
- Place the infant on his or her back for every sleep, not on the stomach or side.
- A sleeping baby should not be placed on a soft mattress, nor should pillows, blankets or toys be nearby.
- Never sleep with an infant while on a couch, armchair or waterbed.
- Never sleep with an infant while on medication or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Have the baby sleep in the same room with parents.

The American Academy of Pediatrics 2005 policy statement, “The Changing Concept of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome,” is posted online at the U.S. Department of Health’s Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control Web site at www.cdc.gov.

A flyer listing the Top 10 safe-sleep tips can be found online at The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Web site at www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/.

For more information, contact Walter Fahr, OCS child welfare specialist, at (225) 342-6832, or Janie Kelly, OPH SIDS risk-reduction coordinator, at (504) 219-4615.