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October is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month

In California, 269 infants died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2013, with most deaths occurring when the infant was sleeping. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention refer to sleep-related deaths as Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUID). Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS, is one of three sleep-related causes of death. SIDS is defined as the sudden death of an infant who is less than one year of age that is unexpected and cannot be explained after a thorough case investigation including a complete autopsy, examination of the death scene, and review of the infant's clinical history.

In 2013, 157 infants less than one year of age died of SIDS in California, making it the second leading cause of mortality for infants between 28 days of age to less than one year of age. Despite years of research, the exact cause(s) of SIDS remain unknown. To help reduce SIDS and other sleep-related deaths, the California Department of Public Health's (CDPH) endorses the 2011 American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations to educate parents and the public about placing babies to sleep on their backs. Other risk reduction messages include placing babies on a firm sleep surface, room-sharing without bed-sharing, breastfeeding, never smoking around the baby, not letting a baby overheat during sleep, keeping soft objects out of a baby's sleep area, receiving immunizations and regular well-child checks. These important infant safe sleep messages have helped reduce the incidence of SIDS and other sleep-related deaths.

During the month of October, CDPH, SIDS Advisory Council, and California's 61 local health jurisdictions (LHJs) promote SIDS Awareness through a variety of outreach events. These efforts are part of an ongoing campaign to increase public awareness about SIDS and other sleep-related deaths and infant safe sleep practices. California has earned a national reputation for excellence in SIDS education, risk reduction campaigns, and grief and bereavement support services.

This October, I commend the efforts made by the CDPH, SIDS Advisory Council and the LHJs in promoting infant safe sleep practices, and SIDS risk reduction activities.

Sincerely,

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