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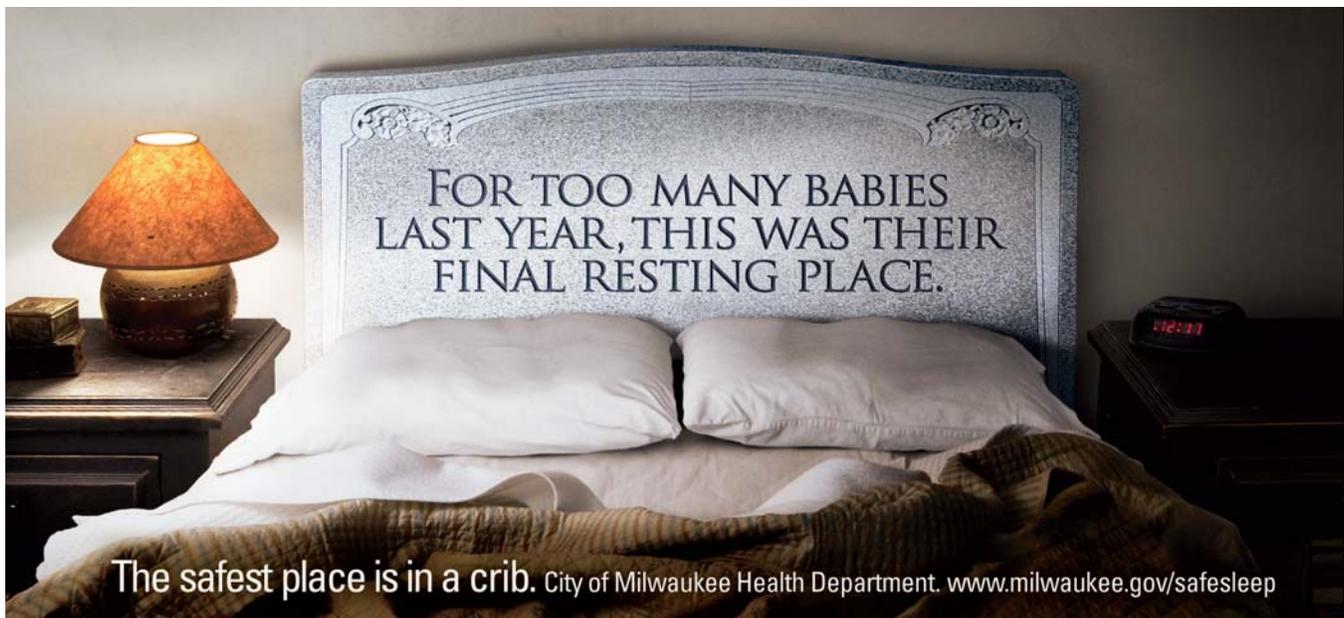
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Health Officials Launch Safe Sleep Awareness Campaign to Further Reduce Infant Deaths

Although the number of babies who died after sleeping in an unsafe sleep environment dropped in 2008, the overall rate of such deaths has remained high in the last decade, prompting public health officials to launch a provocative city-wide safe sleep campaign to prevent them.

“One infant death is one infant death too many, especially when we know there are ways to prevent these tragedies,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan Baker. “We realize that approximately half of the babies lost in 2008 died from complications of prematurity, but we also know that the number of infants who die after being placed in an unsafe sleep environment continues to be a major concern for our city.”

“There are too many infants who die each year from preventable deaths,” said Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett. “Even more troubling is that African American infants born in the City of Milwaukee are approximately twice as likely to die of complications resulting from prematurity and three times more likely to die from SIDS and entrapments than whites.”



For the campaign, the City of Milwaukee Health Department partnered with SERVE Marketing to develop radio and print ads to remind residents that the safest place for a baby to sleep is in their own crib or bassinet, on their backs, with no pillows, bumper pads, blankets, or toys.

Data released by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services show that the total number of infants who died in Milwaukee increased from 111 in 2007 to 120 in 2008. As a result, Milwaukee's infant mortality rate increased from 9.8 per 1,000 live births in 2007 to 10.7 in 2008.

Officials say the rise in total infant deaths results from more prematurity-related complications. The percentage of such deaths jumped from 45% in 2007 to 54% in 2008. Prematurity - defined as birth prior to 37 weeks pregnancy - is the leading cause of death within a baby's first month of life in Milwaukee and nationally. It is also a major cause of long-term health problems, including cerebral palsy, mental retardation, blindness, and chronic lung problems.

However, an encouraging trend in the 2008 data was the drop in the number of infant deaths related to unsafe sleep environments. These deaths decreased from 31 in 2007 to 16 in 2008.

But while the annual infant mortality rate tends to fluctuate from year to year, it is important to highlight that the 3-year rolling average for sleep-related infant deaths has remained unchanged since 2001. Both the 2001-2003 average and the 2006-2008 average were 23 sleep-related deaths per year.

"We hope this new campaign drives home the message that the safest place for a baby to sleep is in their own crib - not in an adult bed," Commissioner Baker said.

The new state data also highlighted small decreases in infant mortality rates for blacks and whites in 2008, though black infants are still three times more likely to die than white infants. The Hispanic infant death rate increased from 5.3 per 1,000 live births to 10.6 during the same time period.

For more information on infant safe sleep, please contact the City of Milwaukee Health Department at 414-286-8620 or visit our Web site at www.milwaukee.gov/safesleep.