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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Breaks New Ground on Child Abuse Prevention

AUSTIN - Two state agencies that work to protect the health and safety of Texans have teamed up on an analysis of child abuse deaths and a plan to help prevent them.

Researchers compared data from the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) about nearly 700 child abuse deaths from 2010 to 2012 with public health information about the victims and their parents maintained by the Department of State Health Services (DSHS). They used the information to develop a plan to target communities with unusually high numbers of sleep-related deaths, deaths related to motor vehicles, and deaths of children who were physically abused.

"This report, and the data-driven, multi-disciplinary plan we've developed with our partners at DSHS, is a milestone for child abuse prevention in Texas," said Sasha Rasco, director of Prevention and Early Intervention for DFPS. "Building upon past research connecting adverse childhood experiences to health outcomes in adults, we finally can see child abuse as a public health issue, and a community problem that can only be attacked with community solutions."

Researchers found that during the three years studied, the deaths of 4,723 children were reported in Texas. Of those, 686 (14.5 percent) were caused by abuse or neglect. Among the trends noted:

- Nearly eight percent of all sleep-related deaths were due to neglect.
- About six percent of motor vehicle deaths were due to neglect, with most of those either children left in hot cars, or cases where an unsupervised child was struck and killed by a car.
- Eight children in the Dallas/Fort Worth area died in hot cars compared to 16 in the rest of the state.
- San Antonio/New Braunfels (17), Midland/Odessa (five), and Beaumont/Port Arthur (nine) had higher than expected numbers of sleep-related deaths due to neglect.
- Many risk factors for child abuse deaths are also known risks for domestic violence.
- Infants who died from sleep-related neglect were likely to have a mother who smoked during pregnancy.

The strategic plan calls for the development of programs in each of the areas targeted: motor vehicle deaths, sleep-related deaths, and child abuse deaths that can be correlated to domestic abuse in the home.

The study found that two-thirds of mothers whose children died of abuse or neglect received Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits while pregnant. So the study recommends a pilot in WIC clinics in areas with a high rate of sleep-related deaths due to neglect to train clinic employees on safe sleep strategies and if necessary refer pregnant mothers who need help to quit smoking.

In the DFW area, where many of the state's hot car deaths occurred, more intense public awareness and education efforts could be set up.

Link to report/strategic plan here:

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/about/News/other_news/DFPS_DSHP Strategic Plan 2015.pdf