## Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Infant Deaths Connected to Unsafe Sleep Practices**

**Coldwater, MI** – The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency is reminding parents and caregivers of techniques that can help to substantially reduce the infant death rate in Michigan. After years of significant decline, Michigan's infant death rate has held relatively steady since 2004, indicating that not all parents and caregivers are getting the message about safe sleep practices. By eliminating just the unsafe sleep deaths, infant mortality rate could be reduced below the national average.

According to Rebecca Burns, Health Officer for the tri-county health department, "Between 2010 and 2014, Branch, Hillsdale and St. Joseph Counties had reported 58 infant deaths." Of these, 10 of the deaths were sleep-related deaths and seven involved co-sleeping practices. "I find the loss of these babies to unsafe sleep environments to be a tragedy, particularly since such deaths are 100 percent preventable."

All babies should always be placed to sleep on their backs, never on their sides or tummies, in their own crib. Other lifesaving steps parents and caregivers can take to protect their baby include:

- Never put the baby to sleep with adults or other children as the practice exponentially increases the chance of a tragedy occurring.
- Put babies in cribs of their own, never on adult beds, pillows or couches. Use a firm mattress with a tightly-fitted sheet.
- Ensure that the crib does not contain extraneous items -- including pillows, crib bumpers and stuffed animals and use a safe sleep sack instead of blankets.
- Place the baby to sleep on his or her back, not on the stomach or side.

- Do not overheat baby.
- Make certain that no one smokes around baby.

Safe Kids Coalition of Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph County and Hillsdale Council for Child Abuse, Prevention and Awareness, through a Great Start Collaborative subcommittee called Growing Safe Kids, have developed a mobile Safe Sleep educational display. Funding was provided by the Hillsdale County's Great Start Collaborative. This education display will be featured at local events. Stop by to learn more about Safe Sleep and how you can protect your infant or your grand baby. The Coalition is led by the health department. To learn more about Safe Sleep practices visit our website at www.bhsj.org and check out our Quick Info About Health Topics.

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