

**Children's Advocate Encourages Province-wide Response to
Critical Incident Review and Infant Safe Sleeping**

SASKATOON — Bob Pringle, Children's Advocate, has requested that the Ministry of Health lead a broader application of the findings and recommendations arising from a recent critical incident review following the tragic death of an infant on a Regina hospital's Mother Baby Unit.

"I would like to commend the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region, as well as the family affected by this tragedy, for engaging in such a collaborative and transparent review process," said Pringle. "Although the grief of the parents, their family and friends, and the healthcare providers involved is great, it is my hope that comfort can be found in the knowledge that the review of this case and subsequent changes may help prevent future deaths."

With that sentiment in mind, Pringle recently sent a letter to Don McMorris, Minister of Health, encouraging a broader application of the findings and recommendations of this critical incident review across all health regions, programming and facilities in the province.

"The more healthcare professionals who are aware of infant safe sleeping principles and practices, the better informed parents and the public will be to make the important choices that will keep their children safe and healthy," said Pringle.

The Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region critical incident review identified a number of opportunities for improvement that may prevent future harm or injury, including:

1. The region is developing a policy and procedure on babies bed sharing with parents.
2. The region is reviewing the criteria and process for management of babies with possible medical complications, including accessing the nursery.
3. The region is clarifying the process for activating a resuscitation team response on the Mother Baby Unit and making structural revisions to the nurse call and code button systems.
4. Emergency resuscitation drills will test the revisions and ensure all staff members are more comfortable with their use.
5. The region will conduct an external review of its implementation of the model of care used on the Mother Baby Unit, which is based upon Health Canada's Family-Centered Maternal and Newborn Guidelines.
6. The region will increase its communication with parents in advance of their arrival at hospital to prepare them for the family-centered model of care and the role/expectations of fathers and support people.

According to the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, safe sleeping principles and practices can significantly lower the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), which is a leading cause of death in healthy infants. While SIDS rates in Canada have declined in the past decade, Saskatchewan's rate of decline has been slower than most other provinces.

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From 1998 to 2005, the Children's Advocate Office identified SIDS and unsafe sleeping practices to be common themes emerging out of its child death reviews. During that time, the province made significant investments to increase public awareness and provide education for healthcare professionals regarding this issue. The Saskatchewan Prevention Institute was engaged to develop educational materials and continues to be a leader in advocating and raising awareness of infant safe sleeping principles and practices.

"Unfortunately, infant safe sleeping has once again surfaced as an issue warranting attention by my Office," said Pringle. "This is attributable not only to the critical incident review in Regina, but to a trend we are seeing in notifications that my Office receives from the Ministry of Social Services regarding children who die or are critically injured while in care or in receipt of child welfare services."

A review of the notifications received by the Children's Advocate Office since 2009 reveals seven cases of infant deaths where bed sharing, the positioning of the baby on his or her stomach or an unstable surface, and/or overheating due to over-wrapping and confinement of the child may have been a contributing factor in the death. The Children's Advocate has assessed that these tragic cases warrant an immediate public education response by the Office rather than an extended investigation.

"We have already done enough reviews of child deaths with similar circumstances to know that they are preventable through increased awareness by the public and professionals," said Pringle. "The notifications received by my Office are a small sample of all child deaths in our province, but we believe that they reflect broader issues in the general infant population. Therefore, I have urged the Ministry of Health to lead the regional healthcare community by encouraging a province-wide examination of and response to this issue."

Parents and professionals wanting more information on infant safe sleeping principles and practices can find resources online at www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca.

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