

*ONONDAGA COUNTY  
Child Fatality  
Review Team*



*Together, Keeping Kids Safe*

*Annual Report  
2017*

# **Onondaga County Child Fatality Review Team**

## **Annual Report**

**2017**

### **Our Mission**

To conduct a comprehensive, multidisciplinary review of unexpected child deaths in Onondaga county:

- Better understand how and why children die
- Analyze the patterns of child deaths
- Use findings to take action to prevent other child deaths, illness and injury
- Keep children healthy, safe and protected

### **Introduction**

The Onondaga County Child Fatality Review Team (CFRT) reviews cases of Onondaga County children/adolescents 17 years of age and younger who have died and been referred to the Medical Examiner's office. In 2017, 18 child deaths were reviewed by the CFRT. The year of review may not be the year of death. Cases that have criminal charges/investigations pending are reviewed once the criminal case has been disposed of.

The Manner of Death include Accidental, Natural, Homicide, Suicide and Undetermined.

Fifteen of the eighteen deaths had a report filed with the State Central Registry because of the death. One of the fifteen was also already open to Child Protective Services (CPS) and under court supervision.

No children were in the care of DSS at the time of their death.

The CFRT did not review or write any independent reports during 2017.

The CFRT, which is facilitated by the Coordinator, held nine meetings during 2017. Mandatory team members include representatives from:

- Child Protective Services/Children's Division
- County Law Department
- County Health Department
- County Mental Health Department\*
- District Attorney's Office
- Emergency Medical Services
- Medical Examiner's Office
- NYS Police
- Office of Children and Family Services
- Onondaga County Sheriff's Department
- Pediatricians with Child Abuse Certification
- Syracuse Police Department

Permissive Members (case specific meeting)

St. Joseph's Hospital  
The Perinatal Center  
SUNY Golisano Children's Hospital  
Crouse Hospital  
McMahon/Ryan Child Advocacy Center

\*Mental Health – team decided to have mental health at all meetings.

At each meeting, there is a review of new cases and possibly an update on a case previously reviewed. There is also a discussion of old and new business and an update on future trainings.

## **Manner and Cause of Child/Adolescent Deaths**

### **Natural Causes**

One African American male infant between the ages of 0-6 months died of Natural causes/Vascular anomalies of the aortic arch with vascular ring.

### **Accidental Deaths**

Three children, between the ages of 3 months and 4 years died of accidental causes.

- Drowning
- Pedestrian/SUV collision
- Suffocation due to an unsafe sleep environment

One was African American and two were Caucasian

### **Homicide Deaths**

Six children died as the result of Homicide.

- Three were due to child abuse. All three children were younger than three years old. Two were females and one was male.
- Two died in a house fire. One female and one male between the ages of four and nine.
- One 15-year-old male died due to gunshot wounds/street violence.

Four were African American and two were Caucasian.

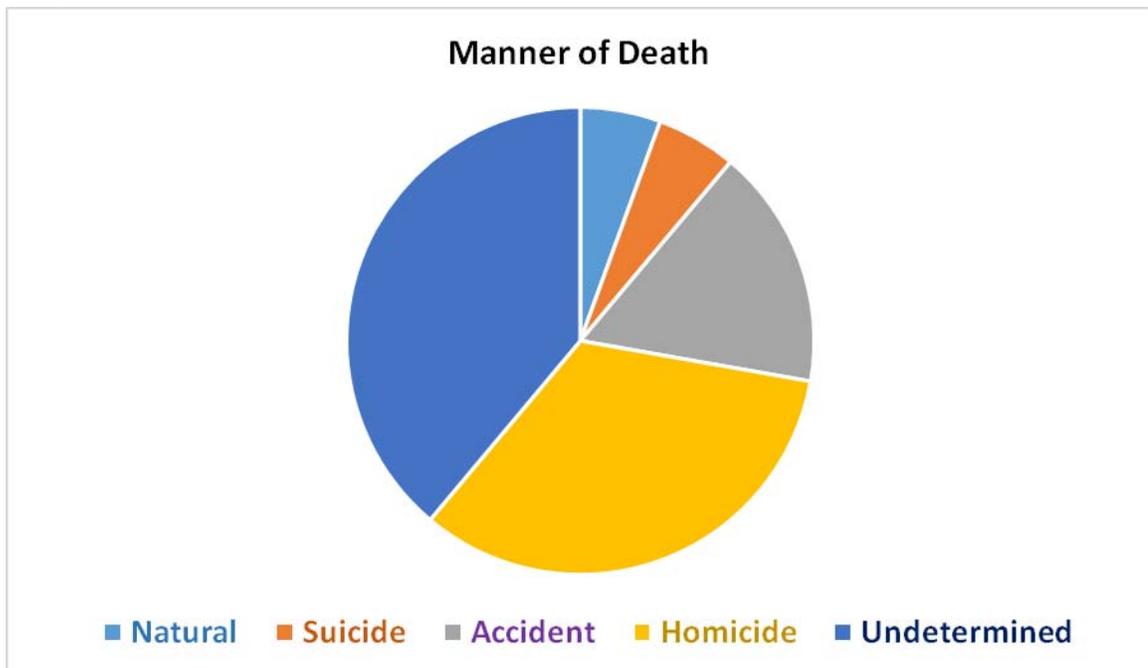
### **Suicide Deaths**

One 17-year-old Caucasian male died due to self-inflicted gunshot wound.

## Undetermined Deaths

Seven deaths were Manner/Undetermined:

- Sudden death associated with unsafe sleep environment – 2 week old Caucasian male
- Sudden death associated with unsafe sleep environment – 3 month old African American female
- Suffocation death due to unsafe sleep environment – 4 month old African American female
- Undetermined – 4 month old Caucasian male
- Sudden death associated with co-sleeping – 4 month old African American male
- Undetermined (with a component of unsafe sleep environment) – 6 month old African American female
- Sudden death associated with unsafe sleep environment – 7 month old African American female



## **Summary of all deaths**

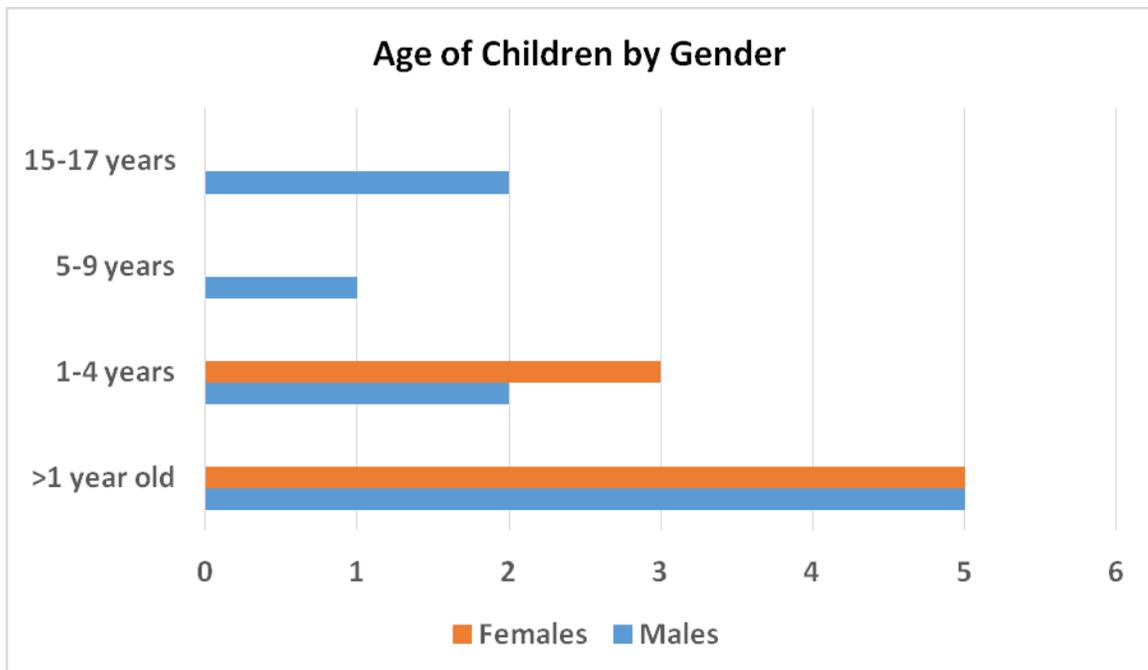
Deaths involving unsafe infant sleep environments (7) were the most frequent cause of child fatalities reviewed by the CFRT. This is 39% of the total cases reviewed in 2017.

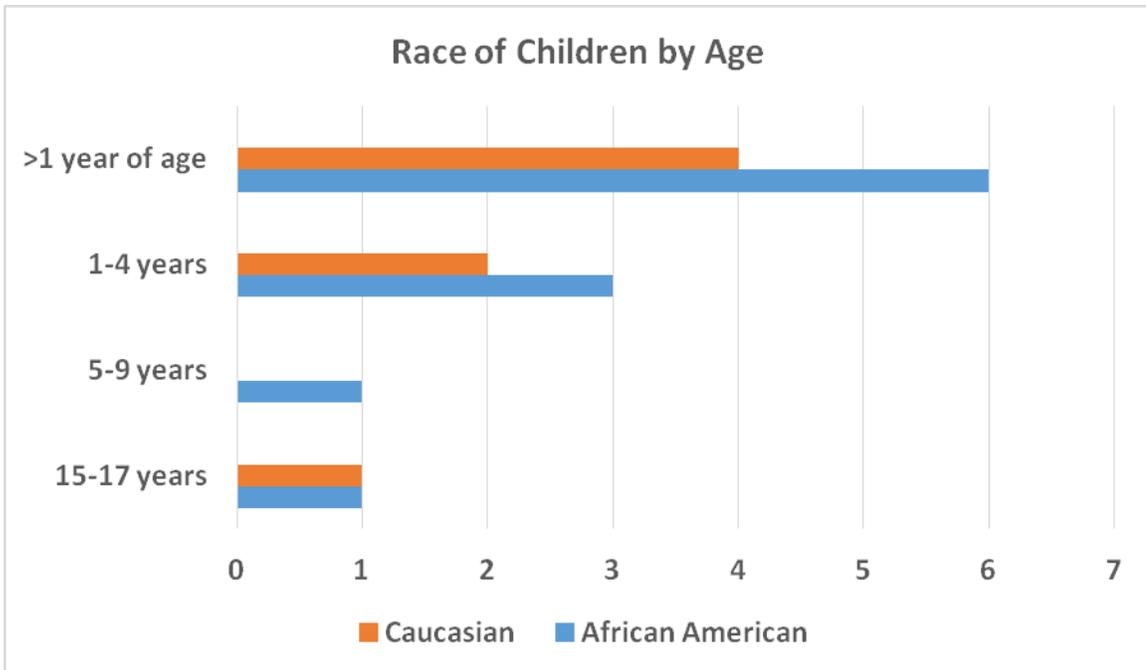
Natural deaths were (1) or 5%. Accidental deaths were (3) or 17%. Undetermined deaths were (7) or 39%. Homicide deaths were (6) or 33% and Suicide deaths were (1) or 5%.

## **Infant deaths**

Ten infants (under one year of age) were reviewed by the CFRT. This is 55.5% of the total cases (18) reviewed.

Co-sleeping and/or unsafe sleeping environment were factors in seven out of ten or 70% of the infant deaths.





### **Team Activities**

Unsafe sleep environments is the leading cause or contributing factor in the deaths of the infants reviewed by our team. These are often preventable deaths. In an effort to promote health, wellness and safety to the children of our county, the following prevention measures were undertaken by members of our team.

- **Child Fatality Review Team Web-site:**
  - Informational topics for agencies within the community and for the public. Bereavement resources are on the web site.
- **Safe Kids Upstate:**
  - CFRT is an active partner participating in events and providing information on safe infant sleep:
  - Safe Kids Sunday at the Chiefs Game – 6/25/17

- **The Onondaga County Suicide Prevention Coalition:**
  - CFRT was a ground roots partner in forming the coalition and continues to be an active member and on sub-committees. Youth are a focus of the coalition
- **NYS Children’s Justice Task Force:**
  - Coordinator is a representative of the child fatality teams and is a member of the Education sub-committee.
- **Safe Sleep Syracuse- Just for Men Facebook page:**
  - Information on safe sleep tips as well as other infant safety measures are posted on the page on average of twice a month. Our posts reached 4,243 individuals plus one specific post of a mother speaking about her infants unsafe sleep death reached 1.3k individuals.
- **Justice Center Education for female inmates:**
  - Safe Infant Sleep Education is presented to the female inmates housed on 3C routinely the third Thursday of the month. Some of these women are pregnant and many have infants being cared for by others while they are incarcerated. 228 women received the education. Some are duplicates but we know that it takes more than one time for the information to be processed and understood.
- **High Schools Health Classes:**
  - Safe Infant Sleep Education has been accepted in Nottingham and ITC high schools. 91 students in health classes received the presentation. In 2018, we are adding Henninger HS students.
- **Vera House Shelter Staff:**
  - 20 shelter staff received safe infant sleep education.
- **Letters to Pediatric Practices:**
  - A condolence letter plus safe infant sleep literature was sent to four different practices after the death of an infant in their practice.

- **Media coverage of the Unsafe Sleep issue:**
  - 4/24/27 article in Syracuse.com ‘How unsafe sleep conditions killed 31 Onondaga County infants’
  - 4/24/17 in Syracuse. Com ‘Putting babies in boxes to prevent infant deaths is catching on in CNY’
  - 4/25/27 letter to the editor in Syracuse.com from the Executive Director of Catholic Charities ‘Catholic Charities urges parents to practice ‘safe sleep’ with babies
  
- **Community/Agency Education & Literature Table:**
  - The McMahon/Ryan CAC does many presentations in the community on child abuse issues. Always included at any event with their literature is safe infant sleep information. Below is a list of events where this information was available:
    - Allen Road Elementary School Fundraiser
    - Heroin & Opioid Addiction & Recovery Resource Night
    - Onondaga Nation Parent’s Meeting
    - SU School of Social Work class
    - Brew fest @ Leavenworth Park
    - Promise Zone – Henninger HS
    - New Teacher Orientation – Nottingham HS
    - Franklin School Teacher Training
    - Head Start Presentations
    - Stand Against Child Abuse Conference (full table)
    - NYS Association of School Nurses (full table)
    - United Radio
    - SUNY Oswego Public Justice Classes
    - Hospice of CNY
    - Nojaims Market gave out brochures and posted the ABCs in English and Spanish on their windows
    - Tops Markets in Westvale put a poster on their bulletin board in the lobby

- **Advertising issues:**

- The Baby Box Company has a false statement on their website about the CPSC endorsing their product as safe. On 11/7/17, I posted a comment on their site with the statement from the CPSC specifically saying they are not subject to any mandatory safety standards. These products do not meet federal definition of a crib, bassinet, play yard, or handheld carrier. They were supposed to respond within 24-48 hours but have never responded nor changed their site.

**Trainings provided by team members or staff within team agencies:**

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: Effects of Child Maltreatment Now and Later by Dr. Alicia Pekarsky on 3/22/17 for an Educational Webcast
- Death Investigation: First Do No Harm by Brian Ehret, F-ABMDI at the Annual Child Fatality Review Team Conference on June 13, 2017
- Death Investigation: First Do No Harm: Part A and Part B by Brian Ehret, F-ABMDI at the Stand Against Child Abuse Conference on 9/26/17

**Recommendations:**

Continue a safe sleep campaign with community agencies and pediatricians to try to decrease the number of infant deaths to co-sleeping and/or unsafe sleeping environments.

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