

*ONONDAGA COUNTY
Child Fatality
Review Team*



Together, Keeping Kids Safe

Annual Report
2020

Onondaga County Child Fatality Review Team

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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 unexpectedly, and have been referred to the Medical Examiner's office or were in the custody of the Onondaga County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFC). In 2020, we reviewed eight child deaths. The year of review may not be the year of death. Cases that have criminal charges or investigations pending cannot be reviewed until the criminal case has been disposed of.

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

Four of the eight deaths had a report filed with the NYS State Central Registry at the time of the death. Three of the cases were already open to Children and Family Services (CPS or Foster Care) or preventive services.

One child was in the care/custody of DCFC at the time of their natural death.

The CFRT did not write any independent reports during 2020.

The CFRT, which is facilitated by the Coordinator, held eleven meetings during the 2020 review year. Mandatory team members include Onondaga County or local agency representatives from:

- Child Protective Services/Children and Family Services
- County Law Department
- County Health Department
- County Mental Health Department*
- District Attorney's Office
- Emergency Management 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
- Syracuse Fire Department EMS

Permissive Members (case specific meeting)

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

*Mental Health – the 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/new business, and an update on future trainings.

Manner and Cause of Child/Adolescent Deaths

Natural Causes

Two children, between the ages of birth and 18 years died of Natural causes.

- Complications of Congenital Anomalies
- Myocarditis of probable viral etiology (unsafe sleep environment a contributory factor)
- Bronchial Asthma

Accidental Deaths

Two children, between the ages of birth and 5-years died of accidental causes.

- Complications of anoxic ischemic encephalopathy due to submersion of water
- Asphyxia due to smothering due to overlay

Suicide Deaths

Two teens died by Suicide, both by Hanging

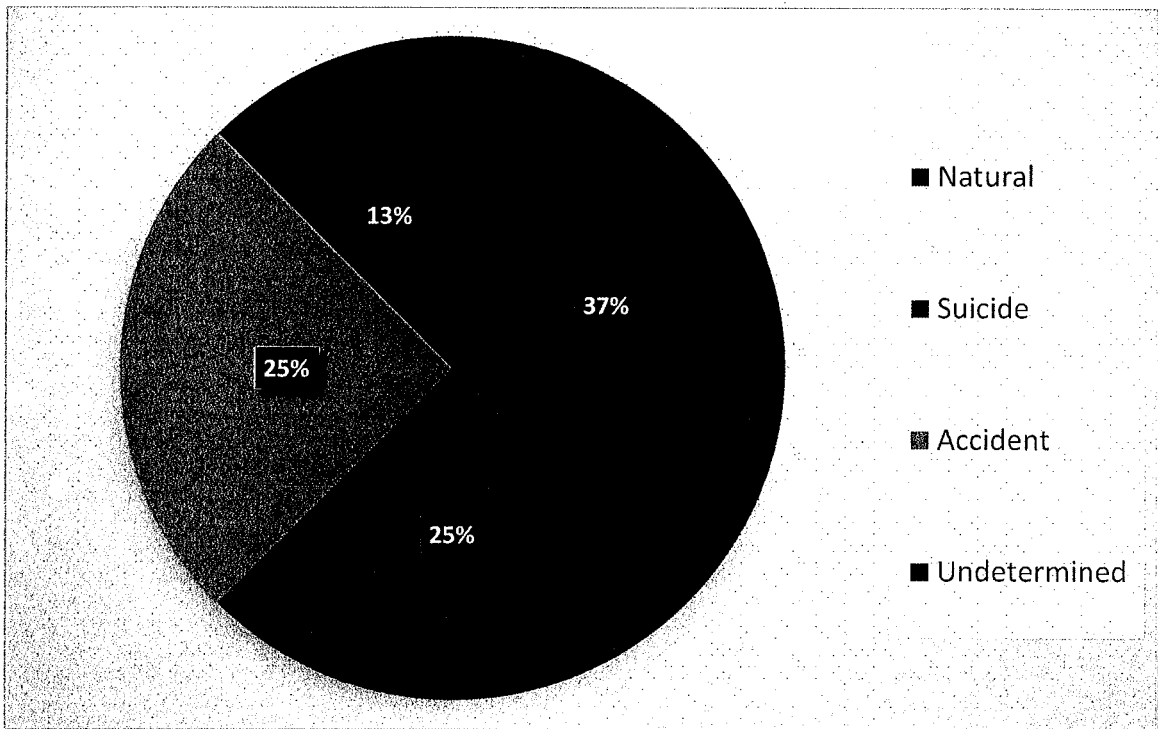
Undetermined Deaths

One infant between the ages of birth and 12-months death was:

- Unexpected Sudden Death in Infancy – Unsafe sleep environment contributory

Homicide Deaths

None



Summary of all deaths

Natural deaths were 37% or 3

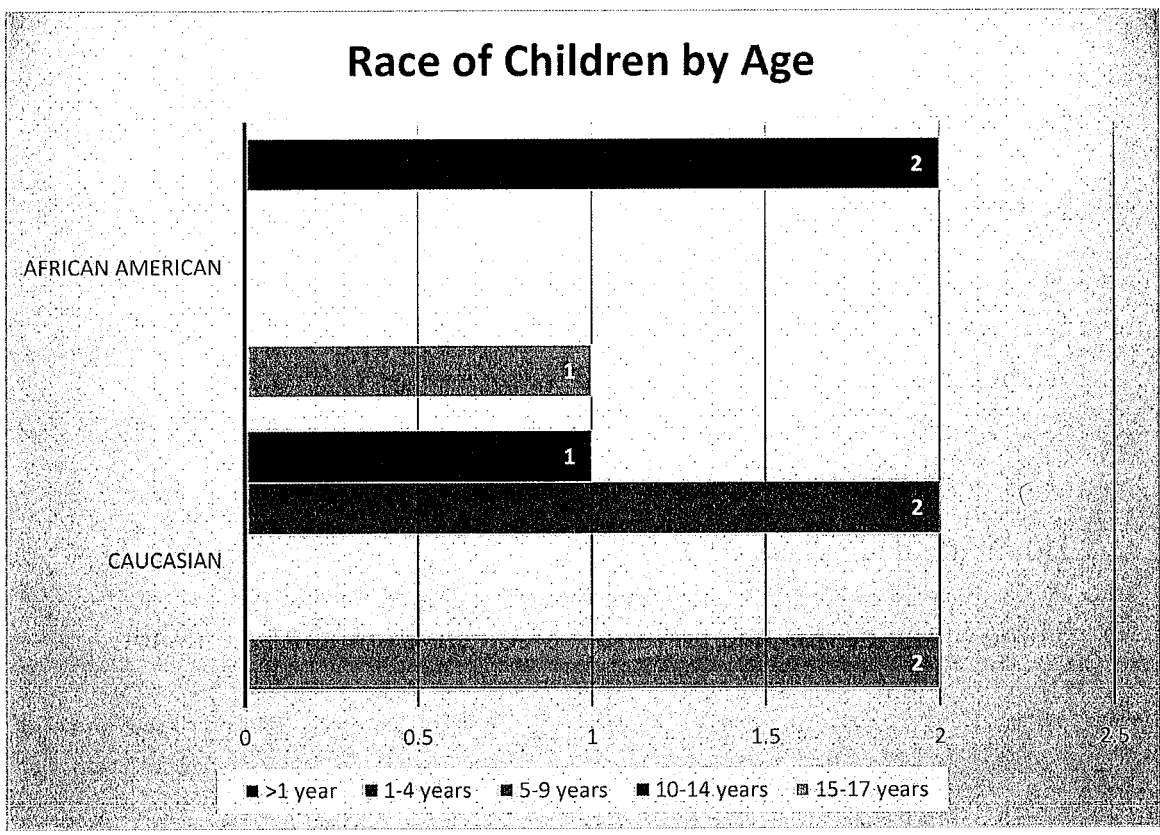
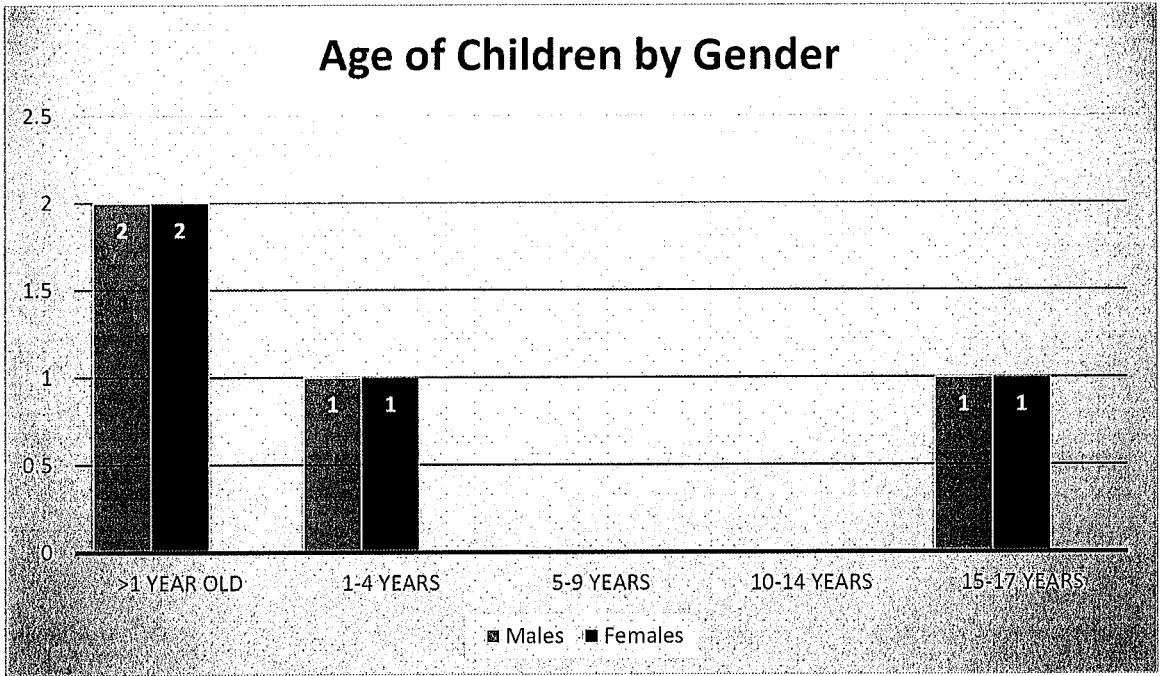
Suicide deaths were 25% or 2

Accidental deaths were 25% or 2

Undetermined deaths were 13% or 1.

Homicide deaths were 0%

Three of the deaths had an unsafe sleep environment as a factor.



Team Activities

Due to the pandemic, most of our community activities were put on hold, meetings and community education classes were done via Zoom where allowed.

Unsafe sleep environment is still the leading cause or contributing factor in the deaths of infants reviewed by our team. As these are often preventable deaths, we focus much of our prevention efforts on educating the community about what a safe infant sleep looks like and the hidden dangers in an unsafe sleep environment. 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 articles, team agencies and resources within the community are listed on the web site and updated regularly.

Site visits for the 2020 review year:

15,948 visits with 23, 805 pages viewed

<http://www.onondagachildfatalityreview.com/>

- **Safe Kids Upstate:** no activity this year.
- **The Upstate Golisano Children' Hospital Safe Sleep team:** no activity this year.
- **NYS Children's Justice Task Force:**
 - The Coordinator is a representative of the NYS Child Fatality Review teams.
- **Statewide Child Fatality Review team**
 - A new Statewide CFRT was established this year. The CFRT Coordinator and the team Child Abuse Pediatrician are members of this team.
- **Safe Sleep Syracuse- Just for Men Facebook page:**

Information on safe sleep tips as well as other infant safety measures are posted on average of twice a month. 30 posts reached 3,423 individuals.
- **Justice Center Education for female inmates:** no activity this year.

- **High Schools Health & Child Development Classes:**

Safe Infant Sleep Education has been accepted in four of our five Syracuse City high schools and Liverpool and Cicero North Syracuse High School. Due to COVID, many scheduled presentations were cancelled.

166 students received the presentation.

- Henninger High School Health Classes – in person
- Liverpool High School – Child Development Classes - virtual

- **Community Safe Sleep Education:**

75 individuals received a presentation and literature:

- Liverpool Teen MOPS group – in-person
- Onondaga County Children & Family Services/Hillside Kinship care/Foster parents – in-person and virtual

- **Press release:**

Onondaga County Health Department and the CFRT jointly shared the following press release on 10/8/20.

“Infant Deaths in Central New York Can Be Prevented”

<https://healthnews.ongov.net/preventing-infant-deaths-10-8-20/>

- **Pack and Play Crib Distribution:**

Thanks to the NYS Office of Children and Family Services PNPs are available to our team for community members in need. We have made partner agencies aware that we have PNPs available for their clients when needed. We know from experience that many families who have lost an infant in an unsafe sleep environment have a safe sleep space in their home, which is not used for infant sleep. The person delivering the PNP is responsible to set up the crib with a fitted sheet (and a spare) and provide the parent/caregiver with education and literature around safe sleep and the dangers of an unsafe sleep environment.

During the shutdown in our county, collaboration between the CFRT, the County Health Department, County CPS, County Probation and REACH CNY made sure that service providers, etc. knew how to make pack-n-plays available to members of our community who needed them.

We gave one PNP to a family and this request came from a Syracuse City School District school liaison right before everything closed.

- **Safe Sleep Ambassadors**

All of the members of the McMahon Ryan Child Advocacy Center's Outreach Team are Safe Sleep Ambassadors through the Cribs for Kids certification program. The Outreach Team always include safe infant sleep education in their community presentations and at tabling events. This year 7 of our Family Advocates became Safe Sleep Ambassadors.

- **Community/Agency Education & Literature Table:**

The McMahon Ryan Child Advocacy Center hosts many presentations in the community on child abuse prevention. Always included at any event is information on infant sleep. There were three events prior to the shutdown and all future events were cancelled.

Suicide Prevention:

- CFRT is an active partner in with the *Onondaga County Suicide Prevention Coalition*. Meetings are held monthly and some were held virtually to continue the Coalition's work.
- Our County is the recipient of a Garrett Lee Smith Grant, which will be utilized by many of the local agencies to enhance services to our youth...
- The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's "Let's Talk About Suicide" was presented virtually by our CFRT Coordinator to the staff of the Onondaga County Children and Family Services.
- The CFRT's *Team Hope* walked and raised money for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention on October 10. This was done safely with time slots and distancing.
- The Onondaga County Health Department received a grant to form a Suicide Fatality Review Team to review Onondaga County deaths (both adults and youth) and look at trends, risk factors and prevention measures. The CFRT has two members on this team.

Resources:

The Onondaga County Child Fatality Review Team website has resources for parents/caregivers and professionals. Prevention information on topics such as Bullying, Firearm Safety, Water Safety and Safe Infant Sleep are just a few. Links are provided to take you directly to the site. Bereavement resources are also included. We provide coloring books for young surviving siblings of children whose death have been reviewed.

Increase Team Functioning:

The Social Services law and the Office of Children and Family Services requires that we have 100% attendance by all mandated members at every meeting. During this crisis time, that was especially difficult. Throughout the year, team members have suggested and successfully recruited other professionals from their discipline to join our team, which has not only increased membership but also brought additional skills and experience to it. Team members who have colleagues who were involved in the investigation of a child fatality will invite the colleague to the meeting. A doctor who may have treated the child when brought to the hospital gives us valuable information about the actual end of life care/death. Pediatricians (Child Abuse Specialist, Emergency Department and a Community Clinic) as well as a Medical Examiner are always at the meetings so the information/discussions are rich with information and education on the medical aspect for our team members. One of our EMS professionals brought the Director of EMS for Children to our team, which again gives us a broader perspective and understanding. Team members bring a special expertise to the team from their own profession.

We recognized that we needed more diversity on our team. The number of African American infants dying in an unsafe sleep environment is twice the rate of Caucasian infants. We need professionals on our team who can help us to better understand the cultural issues and teach us how to communicate the information to the African American community in a way that the information would be accepted. We recognized that although we have many safe sleep programs and literature, the message is not being received to change practice.

Our Medical Examiner's Chief Forensic Investigator is an Adjunct Professor at Syracuse University, Forensic and National Security Sciences Institute. He teaches classes on Forensic Sciences as well as having his students do a class with a mock unsafe sleep death scene. This gives new students the skills to not only investigate but also learn how to treat families with compassion.

Currently he is the President of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators and keeps us up to date on new research such as the new way of classifying pediatric deaths with Intrinsic and/or Extrinsic

causes. He provided us with the new book, "Unexplained Pediatric Deaths: Investigation, Certification, and Family Needs, 1st Edition. A few of the editors have been Medical Examiners in the Onondaga County Medical Examiner's Office.

Advertising

When team members observe questionable images or messages, we reach out to the company to educate and request that the unsafe sleep image be removed or replaced. We also check with the CPSC and the CDC about the safety of products brought to our attention.

A former team member alerted the team about a photo on the **Kidde Corporation** page for Carbon Monoxide Alarm placement. It showed a man, a woman and an infant (sleeping prone on the man's chest). We reached out to Kidde Corporation and within 24 hours the photo was changed to a man and a dog sleeping. <https://www.kidde.com/home-safety/en/us/co-safety/placement-of-CO-alarms/index.html>

Concerns were raised to the team about the Newton Baby's Breathable Mattress that is being advertised as safe for infants to sleep on even in a prone position. We made contact with the CPSC Compliance Officer on safe sleep products regarding the product from **Newton Baby's Breathable Mattress**. The question was whether this mattress is considered safe for infants as advertised. The answer we received is that although it does not strictly adhere to the AAP guidelines, that it does not cross a line to be considered unsafe. They are neutral on the item. <https://www.newtonbaby.com/>

Community Collaboration

Mary Nelson, a well-respected African American woman and community leader agreed to collaborate with the CFRT on providing safe sleep education classes at her center and to help us in whatever way she can to get the information not only heard but also practiced. She also agreed to put literature in her food pantry bags and have literature at the table at all of her events. *All plans were put on hold due to Covid*

<http://www.marynelsonyouthcenter.com/>

Recommendations:

Due to the pandemic, the plans for the year 2020 had to be curtailed in some instances until it was safe to move forward.

- The **Medicaid Doula Project** may be one way that we can reach expecting moms/dads and educate them on safe infant sleep that will influence a change in their behaviors. Doulas develop relationships with their clients well before the infant is born, and they stay involved with them through and after the infant's birth. This project is funded in only two NYS counties and would need the approval of the County Executive of each county to fund this program through Medicaid. The majority of the moms in our county who have lost an infant to an unsafe sleep death are on Medicaid. Increasing this funding to pay for the cost of the training and provide it through Medicaid could increase the availability of a Doula to more pregnant women. The one-on-one education could really help women and men understand the risks of death with unsafe sleep practices and prevent future fatalities.

https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign/doulapilot/pilot.htm

- Continue a safe sleep campaign with community agencies and pediatricians to try to decrease the number of infant deaths due to co-sleeping and/or unsafe sleeping environments.
- Continue working with the Suicide Prevention Coalition to raise awareness about Suicide prevention.

Report prepared by:
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