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**MEDIA NOTE: DOH-Sarasota is redistributing this as a collaborating partner with the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF)**

## **State officials and community organizations launch initiative to prevent infant sleep deaths**

*Babies are safest alone, on their backs, in a crib*

**SARASOTA COUNTY** — Sarasota community leaders along with state officials today launched Safe Sleep Sarasota, a community driven initiative to reduce preventable child deaths in our community. Unsafe sleep is the leading cause of death for children under the age of one in Florida. Last year, over 100 infants died as a result of unsafe sleep in our state. In most cases, these tragic deaths were inherently preventable.

Ten Sarasota County organizations have made a collective commitment to protect Sarasota's youngest and most vulnerable. Safe Sleep Sarasota is an initiative to build a culture of safety and awareness around safe sleep in the community.

"The Safe Sleep Sarasota Initiative is a community driven intervention strategy that tackles a very important issue through innovation and collaboration," said Department of Children and Families Secretary Mike Carroll. "It is this community standing up and saying with one voice that we will protect our children and help our parents."

The Safe Sleep Sarasota Initiative is unique in that it is 100 percent community-funded and community-supported. The organizations involved in the initiative have pooled their energy, resources and connections to make an impact neighborhood by neighborhood. The initiative launched with the assistance of a \$5,000 immediate impact grant from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

"The practice of Safe Sleep is important for every parent, grandparent, and family member to understand so that they can protect their child," said State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health Dr. John Armstrong. "Through collaboration with local and state agencies we are committed to helping all of Florida's babies thrive."

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The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies sleep ALONE, on their BACKS and in a CRIB. Cribs should be clear of items like blankets, pillows, stuffed animals, strings/cords, sleep positioners and bumper pads. Babies should sleep in their own cribs, as the risk of infant death is 40 times higher for babies who sleep in adult beds.

The Safe Sleep Sarasota Initiative is a partnership of the Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County, Family Safety Alliance, Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County, Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, Safe Children Coalition, Sarasota Family YMCA, Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County, Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, Children First, and The Florida Center.

The Safe Sleep Sarasota initiative launch coincides with Infant Loss Awareness Month. On Tuesday, Oct. 21, the Board of County Commissioners of Sarasota County also proclaimed the month of October as Infant Safe Sleep Month.

For more information, free resources, video PSAs and an interview with a Manatee County mother impacted by unsafe sleep, visit [www.MyFLFamilies.com/SafeSleep](http://www.MyFLFamilies.com/SafeSleep). Community groups interested in having a presentation on Safe Sleep Sarasota can contact Healthy Start of Sarasota County: 941-373-7070.

The DOH-Sarasota is part of a statewide network of county health departments that work to protect, promote and improve the health of residents and visitors through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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***MEDIA NOTES:***

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