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Virginia Department of Social Services and Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU partner with Baby Box Co. to provide safe sleep resources and education

Special event will be held to launch new partnership and distribute safe sleep spaces to families

Richmond, VA (August 23, 2017) - Today, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) announced a partnership with Children’s Hospital of Richmond (CHoR) at Virginia Commonwealth University and [The Baby Box Co.](http://www.babyboxuniversity.com) to equip Virginia’s new and expecting families with safe sleep education. Virginia will become the sixth U.S. state to offer its families a free Baby Box program, which will provide both education resources and free baby boxes to the 103,000 babies expected to be delivered in Virginia over the next year, according to [The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation](http://www.henrykaiserfamilyfoundation.org).

The baby boxes, which serve as a safe sleep option for infants up to six months of age, will be on full display at today’s Safe Sleep Launch event. Hosted by CHoR, the event will provide details of the partnership designed to educate all caregivers about important, life-saving sleep practices for infants. During the event, families from Urban Baby Beginnings, one of several statewide community partners, will also be on hand to share their experiences with the baby box program and its helpful resources.

WHAT: Safe Sleep Launch event

**WHEN: Wednesday, August 23, 2017
10 a.m.**

**WHERE: Children’s Pavilion – Level 6 lobby
1000 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
*Parking available in Children’s Pavilion deck — entrance located on 10th Street***

**WHO: VA Secretary of Health and Human Resources Dr. William Hazel;
VDSS Commissioner Margaret Ross Schultze;
CHoR Interim Vice President for Children’s Services Jeniece Roane;
CHoR Pediatrician and Medical Director Dr. Tiffany Kimbrough;
VDSS Director of Family Services Carl Ayers;
Baby Box Co. Co-founder and CEO Jennifer Clary**

In state fiscal year 2015, local departments of social services investigated 127 reports involving 131 child deaths suspected to be caused by child abuse or neglect. Following a comprehensive review of each case, it was determined that for those cases where child abuse and neglect was ruled out as a factor in the child's death, 64% were related to an unsafe sleep environment.

"Unsafe sleep practices are the key factors that contribute to the increase in child fatalities in Virginia," said VDSS Director of Family Services Carl Ayers. "Distributing a safe sleep environment to every baby and educating new parents on risk factors is another step in our ongoing efforts to increase public awareness and reduce sleep-related infant fatalities."

Along with the Baby Box Co., partnership, VDSS will launch a statewide safe sleep campaign in September to provide education, resources and support to all caregivers on the importance of safe sleep practices for infants during their first year of life. The campaign, which will coincide with National Infant Safe Sleep Awareness Month in September and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month in October, will include social media outreach, statewide billboards, and a dedicated microsite.

"In Virginia, sleep-related deaths are the leading cause of death among infants between one month and one year of age. Every baby deserves to have a safe, healthy environment, and that includes the availability of safe sleep spaces," said VDSS Commissioner Margaret Ross Schultze. "Educating parents and the community at-large on the use of safe-sleep practices is critical to the prevention of infant sleep-related fatalities."

Through the National Governors Association's Three Branch Institute, VDSS has led Virginia's team in developing and implementing an integrated approach to improve safety and reduce child fatalities throughout the Commonwealth. Virginia's team, which includes partners from Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, the Virginia Department of Health, the Virginia Supreme Court, the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate, have made a safe sleep campaign a priority of their work in order to help prevent sleep-related fatalities in the Commonwealth.

To further support vital research on the impact of safe sleep practices, education and the use of baby boxes impact in high-risk behaviors associated with infant mortality, VCU and VDSS will also launch a study that will commence in September 2017.

"Our goal in the newborn nursery is to help all families get a healthy start on life," said Tiffany Kimbrough, M.D., CHoR pediatrician and medical director of newborn nursery. "Our primary focus is on ensuring the baby's safety, from lactation and safe sleep habits – to car seats and when to call the pediatrician. We are excited to begin distributing Baby Boxes as part of the Virginia Safe Sleep campaign, and look forward to providing all families with a free, safe and simple sleep environment for their baby. Bumpers, teddy bears and other traditional baby items might be cute, but they can be dangerous and are not part of a safe sleep environment."

“We’re honored to be launching the Baby Box University program in Virginia, where state organizations, nonprofits and the community are not only promoting safe sleep practices, but also taking a holistic approach to child safety and health through education, campaigns and valuable research,” said Baby Box Co. co-founder & CEO Jennifer Clary. “The Baby Box University program, combined with these efforts, will further impact a broader message that education is vital to ensuring babies have a safe and equitable start in life.”

For more information on Virginia’s Baby Box partnership, visit www.babyboxco.com. To learn how to receive a Baby Box in Virginia, click [here](#).

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