

NEWS RELEASE

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**At that time the Child Fatality Task Force will meet in
Room 1228 of the General Assembly Building**

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Child Death Rate Drops to Lowest Ever Recorded

RALEIGH – In 2008, North Carolina’s child death rate decreased to the lowest rate ever recorded, according to the NC Child Fatality Task Force, a legislative study commission which studies the causes of child deaths and makes recommendations to prevent future deaths.

Official figures gathered by the State Center for Health Statistics and the Child Fatality Prevention Team Research Staff show a rate of 71.0 deaths per 100,000 children from birth through 17 years of age.

“This represents a 5 % decrease from 2007, an 18 % decrease in the past decade, and a remarkable 33% decrease since the inception of the Task Force in 1991”, said Tom Vitaglione, co-chair of the Task Force, and a Senior Fellow with Action for Children North Carolina. “It is largely the result of increased appropriations and safety legislation passed by the General Assembly, the hard work of state and local agencies, and the attentiveness of parents in protecting their children”.

The release of these data begins the annual study cycle of the Task Force. “We are charged with examining why and how children die in North Carolina”, said Krista Ragan, the Research Director of the NC Child Fatality Prevention Team. “Our goal is to identify the factors contributing to these deaths and make recommendations that will further decrease child fatalities.”

Highlights of the data include:

- Stated another way, if the 1991 child death rate of 107 per 100,000 children had remained the same in 2008, an additional 800 children would have died in that year – enough to populate an entire elementary school.

- As reported earlier, the infant death rate dropped by 3.5% in 2007. The new data indicate that the death rate for the 5-14 age group dropped significantly, while the death rates for the 1-4 and 15-17 age groups remained relatively the same.
- Sudden infant death syndrome accounted for 136 deaths in 2008, up from 98 in 2007. The study of this sharp increase will be given priority.
- For the second straight year, the number of motor vehicle-related deaths dropped by more than 10%. In part, this may be due to a drop in motor vehicle usage due to gas prices. It is also likely due to a series of safety laws recommended by the Task Force over the years, including the graduated drivers license system; child passenger safety seats and booster seats; enhancements in seat belt laws; and all-terrain vehicle safety requirements.
- The three bicycle-related deaths in 2008 is the lowest number ever recorded in North Carolina. Before passage of the bicycle helmet requirement for riders under age 16, recommended by the Task Force in 2001, the number of these deaths had crept up to 18 annually. Since many children still do not wear helmets, parents are encouraged to protect their children in this regard.
- Homicides (58) and suicides (22) have stabilized over the past five years. These tragedies continue to be the focus of Task Force studies.
- The General Assembly has asked the Task Force to study the 18 poisonings that occurred in 2008. These are generally drug overdoses. There is concern that children are gaining access to their parents' prescription drugs.

The NC Child Fatality Task Force also released the number of child deaths for each county by cause and age. Because the numbers for each county are relatively small, rates are not computed. State and county data can be found online at <http://ncchild.org>.

In 1991, the NC General Assembly adopted a child fatality prevention system. This system includes the NC Child Fatality Task Force, the policy arm of the system; the State Child Fatality Prevention Team (under the direction of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner), which reviews individual cases and identifies statewide trends; and local child fatality prevention teams in all 100 counties, which review local cases and recommend local changes needed to prevent future child deaths.