



Tom Barrett
Mayor

Bevan K. Baker, FACHE
Commissioner of Health

Health Department Administration

Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 North Broadway, 3rd Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3653 phone (414) 286-3521 fax (414) 286-5990
web site: www.milwaukee.gov/health

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Media Contact: Kawanza Newson, 414-286-3548 Office, 414-732-7250 Mobile

Erika Monroe-Kane, Department of Children and Families, 608-266-8691

A SAFE HAVEN FOR INFANTS

City of Milwaukee Health Department and

Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare urge residents to protect its youngest residents

The City of Milwaukee Health Department and the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare are deeply concerned about recent infant deaths, including the abandonment of a newborn this week, and want Milwaukee County residents to know that there are ways to keep newborns safe.

Wisconsin's Safe Haven law, passed in 2001, protects mothers of newborn children if they are unable to care for their new baby. Parents of newborns less than 72 hours old can call 911 and give the baby to the responder without fear of prosecution. Parents can also give the baby to any hospital employee. The law protects the woman's right to remain anonymous: she will not be forced to give her name or any identifying information. Once relinquished, the baby will receive any needed medical care, and then Child Protective Services will find foster parents and potentially adoptive parents for the baby.

To be protected by this law, it is essential that the baby be handed to a hospital employee or 911 responder person-to-person. If the baby is not handed to a person, the case will be considered child abandonment or neglect, which is against the law.

The first 72 hours of a child's life are the most vulnerable. It is critical that knowledge of this important law be widely disseminated, and that women know that even if they cannot care for their newborn, there are those who can and will.

Other City of Milwaukee Health Department recommendations to help keep infants safe include the following:

- Stop smoking. Women who smoke are more likely to have a premature baby, a low birth-weight baby, or a miscarriage or stillbirth. Infants exposed to second-hand smoke have an increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
- Know your medical history. A woman is at especially high risk of having a premature baby if she already has had one premature delivery before. She should work closely with her medical provider or a high-risk obstetrical provider to reduce this risk.

- Educate yourself. All pregnant women should be familiar with signs and symptoms of preterm labor, and see medical care immediately if they experience any vaginal bleeding or unusual cramping.
- Get prenatal care early. Premature babies are more likely for women who have medical problems such as high blood pressure, some of which can only be diagnosed by a doctor. Every pregnant woman should get prenatal care as early in her pregnancy as possible. If possible, get signed up for health insurance (such as BadgerCare Plus) and see a doctor even before getting pregnant.
- Treat infections. Dental, urinary tract and sexually transmitted infections are also associated with an increased risk for premature delivery. Prompt medical treatment is essential.
- Practice Safe Sleep. All infants should sleep by themselves in a crib, with a tight fitting sheet, on their backs and without bumper pads, pillows, blankets or toys. Infants should never sleep in a bed with other adults or children, and they should never be placed on a soft surface like a couch or chair to sleep.
- Reduce Stress. Studies show that women under chronic stress are more likely to have low birth-weight or premature babies. Work with elected officials and community leaders to help support girls, women and families, as well as to reduce poverty and racism in our community.

For more information on childhood wellness, please contact the City of Milwaukee Health Department at 414-286-3521 or visit their web site at www.milwaukee.gov/health. Additional information is also available on the Department of Children and Families web site at www.dcf.wisconsin.gov.

For more information on the Wisconsin Safe Haven Law, visit www.legis.state.wi.us/2001/data/acts/01Act2.pdf

Parents may find more information about this safe alternative to infant abandonment by calling the toll-free crisis line, (877) 440-BABY, or on the Internet at www.safeplacefornewbornswi.com.