

SANTA ANA POLICE DEPARTMENT

DAVID VALENTIN · CHIEF OF POLICE

TRAINING BULLETIN

"Education promotes professional and responsive law enforcement"

Child Death Investigations/SIDS

Purpose

The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to familiarize officers with child death investigations and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, (SIDS). This Bulletin establishes procedures and guidelines to assist officers when responding to child death investigations.

Introduction

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or **SIDS**, is the sudden, unexpected death of an infant under one year of age, which remains unexplained after a thorough case investigation. This includes the examination of the death scene, review of the clinical history, and the performance of a complete autopsy. SIDS is the leading cause of infant deaths from one month to one year of age in the U.S. Most of these deaths occur between two and four months of age. The death of the infant is usually sudden and silent and leaves unanswered questions causing intense grief for parents and families.

SIDS is not preventable, but the risk can be reduced by placing the baby on his or her back to sleep on a firm surface, making sure of a smoke free environment, by keeping the infant from being overheated, having the infant sleep with the face uncovered, and providing a safe sleeping location. SIDS is not caused by suffocation, child abuse, or neglect.

All calls for services where there is a death of a child should be investigated as a potential Homicide. All police responses **shall** be documented on an information report or if suspicious in nature, a crime report.

I. First Responder Investigation Guidelines

1. When arriving on scene, exercise scene safety.
2. Get medical attention for the infant as deemed necessary.
3. Assign an officer to remain with the potential crime scene.
4. Make notifications to the field supervisor and watch commander. The watch commander will notify the C.A.P./Family crimes sergeant according to policy.
5. Watch commander or designate notify the coroner and joint investigation will be conducted.
6. Interview the parents or caretaker, other people living in the household, and the emergency room doctor. Document all interviews.

7. Get a medical release form and consent to search form signed by the parents.
8. Request crime scene investigation for photos of the infant and scene.
9. Document your observations of the scene and infant.
10. Assist the family with grief counseling, (Chaplin, pastor, and/or priest). Contact the watch commander for referrals.

II. Investigation Questions

1. Infant's name, age, sex?
2. Who is the primary caregiver? Names of parents?
3. Discovery date, time and by whom?
4. Pronounced death date, time, and by whom?
5. Was resuscitation attempted? By whom?
6. Was anything covering the child's face?
7. Last person to see the child alive? Date and time?
8. Name of child's pediatrician?
9. Was the child full-term? Premature?
10. Other children? (Document)
11. Other adults in household? Interview and document
12. Has the child been ill recently? If so, explain
13. Was the child taking medication? If so, list name and dosage. Collect.
14. Have there been any SIDS deaths in the family?
15. History of child abuse with deceased and siblings? Contact CAR clearing line @704-6101. Report to Child Abuse Registry if abuse or neglect is suspected, per Training Bulletin 00-05.
16. Items collected at scene or Hospital? (baby bottle, formula, diaper, clothing, medicine, and bedding.) In conjunction with the Coroner Investigator.
17. Medical release and consent to search form signed?
18. Station 71 report attached?
19. Document observations of child? Visible bleeding, bruises?
20. Supervisor, Watch Commander notified?
21. Crime Scene Investigation?

Summary

Responding to incidents where the death of a child occurs can be challenging and emotionally difficult. Law enforcement officers need to be sensitive to the needs of parents who have lost their child, but at the same time, a thorough death investigation needs to be completed. The preliminary investigation might point to a possible SIDS death but subsequent autopsy examinations could result in the death being classified as a homicide. Conducting a thorough investigation in any child death incident is crucial if the cause of death becomes suspicious.

Acknowledgment:

Researched and Prepared By: Cpl. Robert Valdez #2383

Published Date: May 2008

Reviewed By: Cmdr. R. Ibarra

Review Date: July 2010

Reviewed By: Training Division

Review Date: August 2010