

County Executive Declares Shaken Baby Syndrome Awareness Week

Special Presentation at Tonight's Legislature Board Meeting

Poughkeepsie... Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro has announced April 15th to April 21st *Shaken Baby Awareness Week* in Dutchess County as part of ongoing efforts to heighten awareness and provide important information about Shaken Baby Syndrome to new parents and caregivers. Each year throughout the United States as many as 1,400 children are the victims of Shaken Baby Syndrome.

“Prevention education programs in our local hospitals and through our county Health Department have helped raise awareness in parents, caregivers, daycare providers and others about the dangers of Shaken Baby Syndrome,” said County Executive Molinaro. “It is critical for caregivers to understand the triggers that can lead to Shaken Baby Syndrome so they can effectively avoid them and keep infants and young children safe.”

Shaken Baby Syndrome is a serious and clearly definable form of child abuse that occurs when a caregiver loses control and shakes a baby or young child. Shaking infants or children up to the age five causes damage to the brain and can result in death or serious injuries. Infants and children up to five years old are extremely vulnerable to injuries from shaking, because their neck muscles are not strong enough to control the motion of their head. The brain and blood vessels of a baby are extremely fragile and easily damaged by whiplash motions such as shaking, jerking or jolting.

The results are one of every four shaken babies will die and two out of every four who live will suffer from brain injuries causing coma, paralysis, seizures or blindness.

Efforts to educate caregivers about the dangers of Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) are at every level. Nationally, organizations such as Prevent Child Abuse America and the National Center for Shaken Baby Syndrome are working to increase awareness. Other organizations work at state and local levels such as the Upstate New York Shaken Baby Syndrome Prevention Project and the SKIPPER Initiative. Locally, new parents are educated about the dangers of Shaken Baby Syndrome following the birth of infants at local hospitals. At Vassar Hospital, this is the 10th year of SBS prevention education. Dutchess County public health nurses also educate parents and caregivers about SBS on every Maternal and Child Home program visit.

Dutchess County Commissioner of Health Dr. Michael Caldwell said, "Anyone caring for a child should know that if a baby is not uncomfortable or sick but will not stop crying, it is okay to put the baby down in a safe place (like a crib) and take a short break to relax. It is common for babies to cry for up to three hours a day, some cry even more than this; so it is important for caregivers to find ways to remain calm and ask for help when they need it."

George Lithco, an advocate for the SKIPPER Initiative - an organization named for his son, George "Skipper" Lithco, who was shaken by his home day care provider and died at 11 months old, notes the education efforts are helping to raise awareness. Between 1999 and 2003 there were eight cases of inflicted head trauma in Dutchess County. Since then, Mr. Lithco is aware of one. To mark these achievements, County Executive Molinaro and the Dutchess County Legislature will recognize the efforts of George Lithco and local hospitals to educate parents and caregivers that help prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome at tonight's Legislature Board Meeting at 7pm.

Dutchess County Legislator Donna Bolner, who is also the chair of the Legislature's Family & Human Services Committee, said, "I am the mother of two children, both delivered at Vassar Brothers Hospital and I received the Shaken Baby Syndrome education while at the hospital. It was so helpful for me to have had the advice of the nurses when my own daughter suffered from colic for the first twelve weeks and remember that it is ok to place the baby in her crib and step away for a few moments when the crying gets to be overwhelming." Legislator

Bolner continued, “ It is important we recognize the good work that so many are doing in our community to raise awareness about Shaken Baby Syndrome and it is even more important we continue to educate all those who care for children so we can prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome entirely.”

For more information about Shaken Baby Syndrome and how to recognize the warning signs, visit www.dutchessny.gov.

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