

Child Fatality Review #08-80
Region 2
Yakima County

This 19-month-old Caucasian male died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Case Overview

On December 28, 2008, the foster mother of this 19-month-old male found him in bed and unresponsive at approximately 7:00 a.m. The foster parents attempted CPR and transported him to a Yakima area hospital. They arrived at the hospital at 8:05 a.m. The child was examined by an attending physician. Resuscitation efforts by medical professionals were unsuccessful, and the child was pronounced dead at 8:25 a.m. Upon arrival at the hospital, his body was very cold, indicating he had been dead for a few hours. There was no bruising or obvious signs of trauma.

The child's social worker reported he had no known medical issues. His foster mother took him to the doctor regularly, and he was otherwise healthy. The foster mother reported she swaddled him in a blanket and placed him on his stomach with his face to the side. She checked on him at 7:00 a.m. and found him in the same position she put him in when she put him to bed, but with the blanket only slightly off his shoulders.

She reported she swaddled him every night, and he usually woke up without a blanket. The foster mother said he was swaddled to help him sleep. There were no prior reports to Child Protective Services intake on these foster parents.

The Yakima Coroners Office reported this appears to be a natural death. The Coroner found this child's airway was clear and there is no indication of foul play. The Coroner confirmed that suffocation was ruled out as the cause of death. The Coroner was unable to determine the cause of death but did report that there was no bruising or obvious trauma.

The deceased child and his two siblings came into foster care in May 2008. Children's Administration intake received a referral alleging physical abuse of the deceased child's seven-year-old brother. Law enforcement placed the deceased child and his two siblings in protective custody.

A dependency was established for all three children and all were placed in the same foster care home up until this child's death. During the dependency period, the birth mother participated and successfully completed all court ordered services. In April 2009, the department returned the two surviving siblings to their birth mother. Children's Administration social workers are monitoring their progress and will dismiss the case in October if there are no additional concerns.

Referral History

This referral history is on the deceased child's mother. There were no prior referrals on the foster home where he and his siblings were placed at the time of his death.

On May 21, 2008, a school nurse reported to CPS intake that the seven-year-old brother of the deceased child had bruises and red marks from his lower legs to the middle of his back. The boy said his mother beat him with a cable. The referrer said the marks were consistent with his statements.

Police officers did a well child check, and said the child's injuries were enough to place him in protective custody. This child said his mother also beats his 3-year-old sister with the cable and slapped his 12-month-old brother (the deceased child). The CPS investigation was closed with a founded finding for physical abuse. The children were placed in foster care, and a dependency petition was filed.

On September 29, 2008, the child's social worker reported to CPS intake that the deceased child's three-year-old sister reported her mother drank a lot of beer and let men touch her and her older brother. The seven-year-old brother was very angry at his mother and threatened to kill his mother. The CPS investigation was closed with an unfounded finding for sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and negligent treatment.

Issues and Recommendations

Issue: The foster parents chose to transport the deceased child to the hospital in their car rather than calling 911. The foster parents said they made this decision because it was faster to transport him themselves rather than waiting for emergency medical services to respond in the rural area where they live.

Recommendation: Washington Administrative Codes (WACs) and pre-service training material implies that 911 should be called in medical emergency situations. However, there is no clear language that states 911 must be called. Training material should reflect that absent telephone service, 911 must be called whenever there is a medical emergency involving a foster child.

Issue: Concerns were raised about the foster mother swaddling the child and placing him on his stomach. The DLR and law enforcement investigations revealed that the deceased child was swaddled and placed on his stomach when he was put to sleep by his foster mother.

Recommendation: Foster parents need to abide by WAC 388-148-270, which reads, "You must follow the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics, placing infants on their backs each time for sleep, unless advised differently by the child's physician"

In addition, the team recommended foster parents participate in the "Safe Sleep" training to inform and educate on them on the practice of swaddling, to include age appropriateness.

Issue: The notification to the deceased child's biological mother of his death was received beyond a reasonable amount of time. The child's official time of death was 8:25 a.m. and mother was notified at 3:50 p.m. later that same day.

Recommendation: When Children's Administration has legal custody of a child and that child sustains a serious injury or dies while in the custody of the state, the biological parent shall be notified at the earliest possible time after such injury or death occurs.