

Child Fatality Review #09-05
Region 3
Whatcom County

This 12-month-old Caucasian female died from unknown causes.

Case Overview

On January 21, 2009, the deceased child had been fussy and slightly ill with a cold. Her mother took her into the doctor for a scheduled well child visit for check up and vaccinations. The deceased child was deemed well enough to receive the vaccinations, and she had four that morning. Her parents reported giving her Tylenol as directed that day and put her to bed about 5:30 p.m. She began fussing an hour or two later and her father reported comforting her and she went back to sleep. Her parents checked on her again around 9:00 p.m. and she was non-responsive. Emergency responders were called to the home. Attempts to revive her were unsuccessful, and she was declared dead. When evidence was being collected, officers located some marijuana in a closed container under the crib. The parents both admitted they smoked marijuana that day.

The toxicology reports from the autopsy were negative for any suspicious substances. There was no indication of physical trauma and no evidence of infection. Her airway was clear. The autopsy concluded that the child was an age appropriate female without evidence of trauma, abuse or neglect. A complete forensic autopsy revealed no specific cause for the child's death. The parents were referred to several services, including grief counseling, when the social worker made a home visit after the death of their daughter.

Referral History

On January 2, 2009, medical staff called Child Protective Services (CPS) intake after the deceased child's parents brought her in to an emergency room with a blistering burn on her right hand. The parents were not precisely sure how the burn had happened, and hospital staff thought the situation suspicious. The child had crawled under the sink area and was pulling herself up on the pipes under the cabinet when super-heated water from the malfunctioning heater and leaking pipe spilled onto her hand. The parents had not been aware of the heater problem or leak.

The family doctor reported that the parents were conscientious about their daughter's health care, had a good record for bringing her in to the doctor for appropriate concerns. This referral was accepted for investigation and the CPS case was closed with an unfounded finding.

Issues and Recommendations

Issue: The team reviewed the record with the two social workers who were involved in the case. No issues were identified. The practice in this case was commendable, both in

the CPS investigation of the burn and the assessment done after the death. It was thorough, well documented work in accord with all policies.

Recommendation: None