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MOST CHILD DEATHS FROM MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISIONS ARE PREVENTABLE, MEDICAL EXAMINER REPORT SAYS

(RICHMOND, Va.)— A new report from the Virginia Department of Health found that most motor vehicle accidents that result in child deaths occur during the day, in clear weather conditions and on dry roads. The report, from the Chief Medical Examiner's Office, also found that 56 percent of all children were not wearing some form of safety restraint equipment at the time of the accident compared to a statewide average of 30 percent for all motor vehicle occupants.

The report was compiled by Virginia's State Child Fatality Review Team. It reviewed motor vehicle collision deaths involving children and found that 105 children died from such accidents in 2002, the most recent year for which data were accessible.

"The review team found that most of these tragic child deaths were preventable if a few simple practices were followed," said Dr. Leah Bush, the state's Chief Medical Examiner and chair of the review team. "Driving at a safe speed, focusing complete attention on the operation of a motor vehicle and being vigilant in supervising young children in and around a motor vehicle are essential to the protection of lives."

Among the report's major findings:

- Alcohol or drug use was a factor in 26 percent of collisions reviewed by the team and 46 percent of the accidents involved drivers under the age of 18
- More than 60 percent of all fatal collisions involving children occurred during daylight hours and in 75 percent of those instances, the weather was clear and road surfaces were dry
- 80 percent of all children under the age of 2 who were killed as pedestrians were playing in a driveway setting
- Collisions involving drivers under the age of 18 with passengers occurred most frequently in the northern part of the state while collisions involving drivers under the age of 18 who were alone occurred most often in the southwestern part of Virginia
- The most common driver actions contributing to a motor vehicle collision were running off the road, speeding, reckless driving, inattention and overcorrection

The review team offered 34 recommendations for reducing deaths caused by motor vehicles, including additional training for juvenile court judges, enhanced educational programs by the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles and the Virginia Department for the Aging and further study and review of driver education programs offered in the state.

The Virginia Department of Health currently coordinates a child passenger safety program that promotes proper use of safety restraints and distributes 16,000 safety seats each year to families that qualify by income. The program also includes a network of local officials throughout the state who are certified child passenger safety technicians. These technicians will inspect safety and booster seats to ensure that they are properly installed. For more information about the child safety seat program or child passenger safety, call (800) 732-8333 or visit www.SafetySeatVA.org.

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