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Healthy Sleep Project Urges Parents to Teach Teens to Avoid Drowsy Driving
Fatigue-related motor vehicle accidents are avoidable, most common in teens

(Darien, Ill.) April 7, 2015 – Drowsiness is similar to alcohol in how it compromises driving ability, yet many parents of teen drivers do not recognize the hidden danger of drowsy driving. The National Healthy Sleep Awareness Project is addressing this public safety threat by urging all parents of teen and novice drivers to talk with their children about getting nine hours of nightly sleep for optimal daytime alertness and committing to pull over or avoid driving if they haven't gotten enough sleep.

Data show that drowsy driving is a widespread hazard on U.S. roads. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety estimates that as many as one in five fatal accidents involve a fatigued driver. Drivers aged 16-24 years are most likely to be involved in a drowsy driving-related motor vehicle accident.

Kerrie Warne first learned about this threat when her 18-year-old son, Tyler, died in a 2010 car crash after falling asleep behind the wheel.

"Parents need to know how much sleep their kids are really getting and understand what's preventing them from getting enough," said Warne, who founded an awareness organization, TyREDD (Tyler Raising Education about Driving Drowsy), and now speaks to young people about the dangers of drowsy driving. "My son had a TV in his room, a laptop and cell phone he used well into the night – and those things were contributing to his lack of sleep."

What can parents do? The Healthy Sleep Project encourages parents to model healthy sleep behavior, help teens develop a consistent sleep schedule, set restrictions on screen time before bed, and talk with young drivers about drowsy driving and how they can recognize the warning signs.

"Drowsiness is similar to alcohol in how it compromises driving ability by reducing alertness and attentiveness, delaying reaction times, and hindering decision-making skills," said Dr. Nathaniel Watson, president-elect of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) and national spokesperson for the Healthy Sleep Project. "Drowsy driving is deadly, but it's also completely avoidable. Parents need to talk with their kids about drowsy driving when they discuss other threats to driver safety such as distracted and drunk driving."

The AASM recommends that adolescents get a little more than nine hours of nightly sleep for optimal health and daytime alertness. If drivers experience any of the following warning signs of drowsy driving, they should pull over or have another passenger take the wheel:

- You keep yawning or are unable to keep your eyes open.
- You catch yourself "nodding off" and have trouble keeping your head up.
- You can't remember driving the last few miles.
- You end up too close to cars in front of you.

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- You miss road signs or drive past your turn.
- You drift into the other lane of traffic, onto the “rumble strip” or the shoulder of the road.

“Sleep doesn’t only impact the potential for drowsy driving – it also affects grades, health, athletic ability and everything our kids do,” added Warne. “Model and encourage healthy sleep habits when your children are young so they understand the importance of healthy sleep later on – it really could save their life.”

The Healthy Sleep Project’s “Awake at the Wheel” campaign is raising awareness of the risks of driving while drowsy in order to reduce avoidable accidents and save lives. Drowsy driving prevention is a pillar of the Healthy Sleep Project, which is funded by the CDC and led by the AASM in collaboration with the Sleep Research Society (SRS) and other partners. The project partners endorsed the AASM’s Drowsy Driving Health Advisory, which urges every driver to take responsibility for staying “Awake at the Wheel” by making it a daily priority to get sufficient sleep, refusing to drive when sleep-deprived, recognizing the signs of drowsiness, and pulling off the road to a safe location when sleepy.

For more information visit projecthealthysleep.org.

About the National Healthy Sleep Awareness Project

The National Healthy Sleep Awareness Project was initiated in 2013 and is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through a cooperative agreement with the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. The collaborative project addresses the sleep health focus area of Healthy People 2020, which provides science-based, 10-year national objectives for improving the health of all Americans. The sleep health objectives are to increase the medical evaluation of people with symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea, reduce vehicular crashes due to drowsy driving and ensure more Americans get sufficient sleep. For more information, visit www.sleepeducation.org/healthysleep.

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