

## DAD FACING TRIAL IN TOT SLAY FOUND HANGED

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A man accused of blowing PCP-laced marijuana smoke in his baby's face and fatally shaking the 5-month-old has died in an apparent jailhouse suicide, officials said yesterday. Julio Rivera, 26, who was awaiting trial on murder charges in the March 31, 2006, death of his son, Eric Rivera, was found hanging from a sheet when deputies made a bed check shortly before midnight Monday, said Chief Alan Otto of the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department. In January, the child's mother, Cynthia Morales, pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter in a deal that required her to testify against her boyfriend.

Prosecutors said Eric suffered severe brain injuries and had drugs in his system at levels ordinarily found in an adult. They said they believe the father blew the smoke from a marijuana cigarette laced with PCP, also known as angel dust, directly into the baby's mouth and nose to quiet the child when he was fussy.

An autopsy found signs of "acute, chronic and recurrent head injury" consistent with shaken baby syndrome. Blood and urine samples showed the child was "repeatedly exposed to PCP and marijuana consistent with levels ordinarily found in adult users." Rivera's attorney, Michael Brown, said his client maintained his innocence since his arrest but conceded the prospect of a conviction had an impact on his outlook. "From his perspective, the thought of spending the rest of his life incarcerated was a weight too great to bear," Brown said. Otto said an investigation into the death would be conducted, but all evidence pointed to suicide.