



Reducing the Risk of SIDS for Infants in Our Care

What Is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the unexpected and unexplained death of a seemingly healthy infant who is younger than one year. It is the most common cause of death in infants over one month of age. Before an infant's death is attributed to SIDS, all other possible causes must be ruled out by conducting an autopsy, an investigation of the scene of death, and a thorough review of the baby's medical history. When no other explanation for an infant's death can be identified, the death is considered a case of SIDS. Unfortunately, the rate of SIDS deaths in child care is more than double the expected rate. It is important that child care providers adopt safe infant sleep practices to reduce the risk of SIDS in child care.

What Are the Risk Factors for SIDS?

We don't know exactly what causes SIDS. However, several factors have been identified which appear to increase the chances that an infant will die of SIDS. Some of these factors are:

- Placing infants to sleep on their tummies
- Putting infants to sleep on soft mattresses or bedding
- Exposure of an infant to tobacco smoke before and/or after birth
- Exposure to alcohol during pregnancy
- Being born premature
- Being born with a low birth weight

By eliminating those risk factors that we have control over in our home and child care environments we can reduce the risk of SIDS among the infants in our care.

In order to reduce the risk of SIDS:

Infants should never sleep on their tummies.

Infants who sleep in the prone position (on their

tummies) are at increased risk for SIDS, especially if they are used to sleeping on their backs at home. Parents and caregivers are strongly advised to place infants on their backs for any sleep until they are 12 months old. Once an infant can turn from front to back and from back to front easily, the infant should be put to sleep on her back, but should then be allowed to adopt her own position of comfort.

Offer infants a pacifier if the infant uses a pacifier at home

Research indicates that use of a pacifier reduces the risk of SIDS. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents consider offering pacifiers to infants at bedtime until they are 12 months old.

Swaddle infants above the waist

Some infants may have a difficult time settling to sleep on their backs.

Swaddling an infant during the first eight weeks of life may help an infant go to sleep, and may increase the length of an infant's daytime sleep periods. Infants who are swaddled should be swaddled only around their upper body, leaving their legs to move freely and their heads uncovered. Once infants are able to turn onto their tummies, they should not be swaddled, as the risk of SIDS increases when swaddled infants sleep on their tummies.

Babies should sleep on a firm, smooth surface, not on fluffy or soft surfaces such as sofas, waterbeds or soft mattresses. Crib mattresses are the only mattresses that are certified as safe for infants by the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Don't over-heat the house or over-dress babies. Infants who are dressed in too many layers of clothes, have too many heavy blankets on, or sleep in very hot rooms are at higher risk for SIDS. In general, infants need the same number of layers as the adults and older children in the same environment need

for warmth and comfort. When putting an infant to sleep, place the infant with his feet at the foot of the crib, provide a light blanket, placed under his arms and tucked in on three sides. Don't cover babies with plush comforters or heavy quilts and do not cover their heads or faces with a blanket. Using an infant "sleep sack," especially one that allows you to swaddle the infant's upper body, is a safe and convenient alternative to a blanket.

No smoking where infants sleep, live and play.

Infants who are exposed to smoke at home or in child care have a higher chance of dying from SIDS.

Co-sleeping with siblings or parents puts infants at higher risk of dying from SIDS. The risk is also elevated if the infant is co-sleeping with individuals under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that the safest place for an infant to sleep is in a separate crib in the same room with the parents.

What Can Child Care Providers Do?

Educate families and program staff Openly discuss SIDS risk reduction, and the role providers play in SIDS prevention. Most parents consider child care providers to be trustworthy experts in children's health, development and safety. Share your experience and expertise freely with parents. Include the importance of SIDS prevention in your program's health policies and share resources with parents and staff.

Create and enforce program policies, which reduce risk. Program policies should reinforce the principles of SIDS risk reduction (see CCHP's *Model Safe Sleep Policy for Infants in Child Care*). Program staff must be trained in these principles and compliance with policies should be closely monitored. Such policies include:

- **Back to Sleep Policy.** Make it a rule that all infants in your care must be placed on their backs for sleeping (unless the child has a note from health care provider specifying otherwise). Train all staff in the importance of this rule and monitor nap time to be sure it is followed. Discuss the Back to Sleep Policy with the parents of infants during the enrollment process.
- **No Smoking where children are present.** California's Community Care Licensing regulations specify that "smoking is prohibited on the premises" of all

licensed child care facilities, including both child care centers and family child care homes.

- **Keep cribs free of plush items.** Place infants on smooth, firm bedding at nap time. Don't place stuffed toys, pillows, comforters, bumpers or quilts in their cribs.
- **Avoid over-heating infants.** Dress them in comfortable clothes; don't bundle them up in too many warm layers. Keep infants' sleeping area at a comfortable temperature. The National Standards recommend maintaining the indoor temperature between 65° and 75° in winter and between 68° and 82° in summer inside child care facilities (AAP, 2002).

Tummy Time when awake

Tummy time is important for infants (see CCHP's Health & Safety Note, *Tummy Time for Infants*). It allows them to stretch and strengthen the head, neck, shoulder and back muscles they will need to learn important motor skills (for instance, how to push up, roll over, sit up, crawl, and pull to a stand). But it is very important that tummy time occur only when an infant is awake and under the watchful eye of a parent or caregiver.

References and Resources

AAP, APHA & MCHB (2002). Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards: Guidelines for out-of-home child care programs. Online at <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/index.html>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention SIDS Information Index at www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/SIDS/index.htm.

Visit www.cpsc.gov <<http://www.cpsc.gov>> or www.jpma.org <<http://www.jpma.org>> for crib safety standards.

CCHP, *Model Safe Sleep Policy for Infants in Child Care*, available online at http://ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/forms/SafeSleep_policy1108.pdf

CCHP, *Tummy Time for Infants* available online at www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org

AAP Task Force on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (2005). Policy Statement online at www.aap.org

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