

Infant Safety Advisory

September 10, 2024

Safe Sleep

In New York City, sleep-related injuries¹ remain one of the leading causes of death among babies less than 1 year old. About 50 babies die every year in New York City, suddenly and unexpectedly, while sleeping due to accidental suffocation, strangulation or entrapment. A majority of these deaths were among babies between 28 days to 4 months old.^{2,3}

Deaths related to unsafe sleep practices can be prevented. The most recent infant sleep guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (published in October 2016), based on the latest research, provide the following key **recommendations**:^{3,4}

- DO NOT share a bed with your baby
- Babies should be placed on their backs to sleep until their first birthday. They are MORE likely to choke on their vomit when placed on their stomachs
- Use a firm sleep surface with a fitted sheet made for that specific product
- Keep soft objects and loose bedding away from the infant's sleep area
- Do not use a car seat, carrier, swing, bouncer or similar product as a sleep area
- Never place your baby to sleep on a couch, sofa or chair
- Keep your baby's sleep area near your bed for the first 6 to 12 months

UNSAFE sleep conditions/practices include:⁵

- Placing an infant to sleep on their stomach (prone) or side
- Sleeping on the same surface as an infant, especially after drinking alcohol
- Smoking around an infant
- Placing loose, excess or soft bedding in an infant's sleep environment (e.g., pillows, comforters)
- Placing an infant to sleep on an inappropriate surface (e.g. couch, armchair, car seats, stroller)
- Using bumper pads in the infant's bed
- Placing objects in or near the infant's sleep environment (e.g., plush toys, cords)
- Overdressing an infant

Safe Bath time

- Infants can quickly drown in water as shallow as 2 inches⁶
- The most important tip for bath Time safety is: NEVER leave an infant alone in the water!
- Almost all accidental bathtub drownings of infants occurred when the child is unattended⁷
- Infant bath seats/rings are not a substitute for supervision and some consumer protection groups have argued that they are actually dangerous^{8,9}

Shaken Baby Syndrome¹¹

- Shaken baby syndrome is a type of injury caused by **forcefully shaking** an infant or toddler
- Even **five seconds of shaking** can cause **serious injury or death**
- Many cases of shaken baby syndrome are caused by accident, such as when a tired and/or frustrated caregiver is trying to quiet a crying infant
- Shaken baby syndrome is **not** caused by gentle motion such as bouncing on an adult's lap.

Please review these recommendations with your staff, give them a copy of the attached safe sleep flipbook to use when talking to parents about safe sleep, and share with parents: (1) parent letter; (2) frequently asked questions on safe sleep practices; and (3) safe sleep flyer.

Sincerely,



Fabienne Laraque, MD, MPH
Chief Medical Officer

Useful Resources

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/safe-sleep.page>

https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pubs/documents/safe_sleep_environment_rev.pdf

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/sudden-infant-death-syndrome.page>

<https://www1.nichd.nih.gov/sts/materials/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://www.cpsc.gov/safety-education/safety-education-centers/cribs>

Attachments:

1. Safe sleep information
2. Q&A for parents
3. Safe sleep flyer for parents

Information for Shelter Staff on Ways to Protect Babies from Harm Due to Unsafe Sleep Practices

1. Ensure babies sleep on their back for every sleep (bedtime and naptime)

- Place babies entirely on their back until they are 1 year old. This reduces the risk of sleep related causes of infant death, such as suffocation, strangulation and entrapment; side sleeping and sleeping on the tummy are not recommended.
- Give supervised awake tummy time every day to babies to promote muscle development and coordination.

2. Firm sleep surface and sleep environment are important

- Use a firm crib mattress and a tightly fitted sheet for the crib.
- No pillows, blankets, bumpers or other soft objects should be in the crib. They can suffocate babies.
- Never put babies to sleep on an adult bed, bouncy seat, infant swing, car safety seat, sofa, couch, futon, waterbed, sheepskin, or other soft mattress — not even for a nap.
- Only use a crib, bassinet, or play yard (e.g., Pack ‘n Play) that are safe for babies and meet current safety standards.
 - To help a parent find out if what they are using is safe, help them call the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) at 800-638-2772 or cpsc.gov and search “cribs.”
 - Remind clients that they are entitled to a Pack ‘n Play.
- Share a room, but never sleep in the same bed, sofa or other surface as a baby. Parents are allowed to have the baby’s crib or Pack ‘n Play right next to their bed.
- Offer a pacifier to the baby during naptime or bedtime. The pacifier should not be attached to anything, because the string can strangle the baby. If you are breastfeeding, wait to use a pacifier until breastfeeding has been firmly established, usually by 3 to 4 weeks.

3. Avoid overheating

- Dress babies in sleep clothing, such as a wearable blanket (sleep sack). Do not use a blanket!
- Do not overdress babies. In general, they should be dressed appropriately for the environment, with no more than 1 layer more than an adult would find comfortable in that environment.

4. Recommendations for mothers to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep-related deaths:

- Avoid smoking, alcohol or illicit drug use during pregnancy and after birth.
- Breastfeeding has large health benefits for babies, including decreasing infections, chronic diseases and improving infant development, and may also protect against SIDS. It also has benefits for mothers, including faster recovery from childbirth, decrease rate of certain cancers, and diabetes, and has great economic benefits.
- Ensure everyone who takes care of the baby is informed to place the baby on his/her back to sleep, even for naps, and practices all other safe sleep recommendations.

Frequently Asked Questions by Parents on Safe Sleep Conditions or Practices for a Baby

Q. What are sleep related injury deaths?

A. A sleep-related injury death is the sudden death of a baby less than 1 year old that occurs because of where and/or how they were placed to sleep. In these cases, an item like a loose blanket, pillow or another person caused the baby to suffocate and die. Babies placed to sleep on their stomachs can also suffocate if they get trapped and are unable to move their nose and mouth away from the mattress, soft bedding or other objects in the crib, such as stuffed animals.

Sleep-related infant injury death is not the same as **SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)** or “crib death.” SIDS is the natural death of a baby that cannot be explained after a careful medical review of the case. Unlike SIDS, sleep-related infant injury deaths involve accidents that can be explained and are mostly preventable.

All babies, from birth to 12 months old, are at risk for sleep-related injury deaths. However, babies between 1 and 4 months old are at the greatest risk. Around this age, babies’ neck muscles are still very weak and it is hard for them to move out of dangerous situations. Babies also start trying to roll over during this time, but cannot do it well on their own. For these reasons, it is very important to follow infant safe sleep guidelines.

Q: How can I reduce my baby’s chances of dying from a sleep-related injury?

A: The best way to reduce your baby’s risk of a sleep-related injury death is to place them — day or night — to sleep alone, on their back, on a firm mattress and in a safety-approved crib, bassinet, portable crib or play yard. Cover the mattress with a fitted sheet only and do not place loose blankets, pillows, toys or bumper pads in the sleep area. To check if your crib meets safety standards, call the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) at 800-638-2772, or visit cpsc.gov and search for “cribs.”

Q: I have poor heating in my apartment/ unit, and I don’t want my baby to be cold in their crib. How do I keep them warm if I don’t sleep with them or cover them with a blanket?

A: If you are worried about your baby getting cold, dress them in a wearable blanket, such as a sleep sack, or in another layer of baby clothing. In general, your baby should be dressed with only one more layer than what you are wearing. If your unit is too cold, speak to your case manager or shelter director.

Q: My mother shared a bed with me when I was a baby with no problems. Why should I do anything differently for my baby?

A: What we know about sharing a sleep surface with babies has changed over the years. In the past, many sleep-related injury deaths were thought to be caused by SIDS (a natural cause of death). Now we know that many babies die from accidental suffocation while sleeping in unsafe spaces, especially when sharing a bed with another person. These deaths are mostly preventable.

Q: Why my baby should sleep on the back for naps and at night?

A: Babies can breathe better on their backs than on their stomach or sides. When babies sleep on their backs and vomit, they naturally swallow or cough up the fluid, and turn their heads so it rolls down the side of their face. When babies sleep on their stomachs and vomit, they can breathe it in and choke.

Q: I know I shouldn't sleep with my baby, but he/she is fussy. What can I do?

A: Try using the 5 S's:¹⁰

- 1. Swaddling:** It provides warmth and security – the same way your baby felt in the womb. This is done only when you are holding the baby. Do not put the baby down to sleep swaddled.
- 2. Side/Stomach Position:** Hold your baby on the left side to help with digestion. Once asleep, place your baby on the back in the crib.
- 3. Shushing:** This imitates the noise in the womb, making your baby feel calm and safe. It may work best when done loudly.
- 4. Swinging:** You can gently rock your baby in your arms or use a baby swing.
- 5. Sucking:** It is natural, and babies enjoy sucking even when they are not hungry. A baby cannot cry and suck at the same time!

Q: I don't drink or use drugs, so aren't I less likely to smother my baby in bed?

A: No. Innocent mistakes can happen. Even parents who do not drink or use drugs can accidentally smother their babies in bed. Bed-sharing can be dangerous for any family.

Q: How can I breastfeed my baby in the middle of the night if I can't bring him into bed with me?

A: Parents are allowed to have the baby's crib or Pack 'n Play right next to their bed. You may bring your baby into bed with you for feeding or for comfort. However, it is important for you to place your baby back in their own crib or Pack 'n Play before you fall asleep.

Q: Car seats are safety approved. Can they also be a safe place for my baby to sleep?

A: No. Because babies don't lie flat in car seats, they can suffocate when their heads (which are very heavy compared to the rest of their bodies), tip forward, blocking their airway.

Q: What if my baby rolls onto his stomach while he's sleeping? Do I need to put him on his back again?

A: Rolling over is an important and natural part of your baby's growth. Most babies start rolling over on their own around 4 to 6 months of age. If your baby rolls onto their stomach on their own during sleep, you do not need to turn them over onto their back. The important thing is for them to start off on their back. However, swaddled babies are at high risk for suffocation if they roll onto their stomachs. Stop swaddling babies as soon as they start trying to roll. This usually begins at around 2 months of age.

To learn more about Safe Sleep visit nyc.gov/safesleep or call 311.

Source: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene materials.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/about/2017/safesleepbrochure0609.pdf>



PUT THEM TO BED AS IF THEIR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT. BECAUSE IT DOES.



NO PILLOWS



NO BLANKETS



NO TOYS



**NOT ON
THEIR BELLY**



**NOT IN BED
WITH YOU**

Babies sleep safest in a bare crib. Loving but unsafe practices like putting pillows, blankets, and toys in your baby's crib can lead to suffocation and even death.

Babies sleep safest on their backs. It makes it easier for them to breathe, and they are less likely to choke if they spit up.

Babies sleep safest alone, not in bed with you or anyone else. Tired parents can fall into a sound sleep and accidentally roll over, causing their baby to suffocate.

To learn more about Safe Sleep visit
nyc.gov/safesleep or call 311.

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PÓNGALOS A DORMIR COMO SI FUERA UNA CUESTIÓN DE VIDA O MUERTE. PORQUE LO ES.



NO ALMOHADAS



NO COBIJAS



NO JUGUETES



NO BOCA ABAJO



**NO EN LA CAMA
CON USTED**

Los bebés duermen más seguros en una cuna vacía. Prácticas cariñosas pero riesgosas como colocar almohadas, cobijas y juguetes en la cuna de su bebé pueden provocar asfixia y hasta la muerte.

Los bebés duermen más seguros boca arriba. Les es más fácil respirar y hay menos riesgo de que se ahoguen si vomitan.

Los bebés duermen más seguros solos, no en la cama con usted o cualquier otra persona. Padres cansados pueden caer en un profundo sueño y accidentalmente voltearse y asfixiar al bebé.

Para obtener más información sobre el sueño seguro para bebés, visite nyc.gov/safesleep o llame al 311.



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References

1. Sleep-related infant injury death is not the same as SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) or “crib death.” SIDS is the natural death of a baby that cannot be explained after a careful medical review of the case. Unlike SIDS, sleep-related infant injury deaths involve accidents that can be explained and are mostly preventable.
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7. <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/12480/Parent-Plus-How-to-keep-your-baby-safe-during-bath?autologincheck=redirected>
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10. <https://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/what-is-colic>
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