

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)



What advice should health care providers give to parents and caregivers about ways to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death?

Health care providers should encourage parents and other caregivers to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death in the following ways:

- **Always place baby on his or her back to sleep, for naps and at night, to reduce the risk of SIDS.** The back sleep position is always the safest position for all babies, including preterm babies. Keep in mind that every sleep time counts.
- **Use a firm sleep surface, such as a mattress in a safety-approved* crib, covered by a fitted sheet, to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death.** Firm sleep surfaces can include mattresses in safety-approved* cribs, bassinets, and portable play areas. Do not use a car seat, carrier, swing, or similar product as the baby's everyday sleep area. Never place babies to sleep on soft surfaces, such as on a couch or sofa, pillows, quilts, sheepskins, or blankets.

* For more information on crib safety guidelines, call the Consumer Product Safety Commission

- Despite the Safe to Sleep® campaign (formerly Back to Sleep) and other SIDS and safe infant sleep awareness campaigns, many child care providers continue to place infants to sleep on their stomachs. Surveys have documented that some secondary caregivers, even licensed child care center workers, are either unaware of or are misinformed about the dangers of placing infants to sleep on their stomachs.⁹⁸
- Although child care providers are more likely to use the back sleep position when centers have written sleep policies, licensed child care centers seldom have such policies.⁹⁹ Studies have found that education programs for child care providers are effective both in increasing knowledge of safe infant sleep positioning and in promoting the development of written policies on sleep position.¹⁰⁰

Based on the evidence, consistency in sleep position is extremely important for reducing the risk of SIDS. It is crucial that parents and caregivers tell everyone who cares for their baby—including grandparents, child care providers, and babysitters—that the infant be placed on his or her back for every sleep time, for naps and at night.

At what age can parents and caregivers stop placing infants on their backs to sleep to reduce the risk of SIDS?

SIDS is defined as the sudden unexplained death of an infant younger than 1 year of age that remains unexplained after a thorough investigation.¹⁰¹ Parents and caregivers should continue to place babies on their backs to sleep until their first birthday.

Statistics indicate that the first 6 months after birth, when infants are forming their sleeping habits, are probably the most important in terms of using the back sleep position to reduce SIDS risk.¹⁰² Research shows that 90 percent of SIDS deaths occur in infants younger than 6 months of age, with a peak between 1 month and 4 months of age.¹⁰³

However, SIDS can occur at any time during an infant's first year, so parents and caregivers should continue to be advised to use back sleeping and other ways to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death until their baby's first birthday.

Spread the word!

As a health care provider, you have multiple and unique opportunities to share safe infant sleep messages with parents and caregivers to help reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death. Specifically:

- **Always place infants on their backs to sleep.** The back sleep position carries the lowest risk of SIDS.
- **Every sleep time counts.** Infants accustomed to sleeping on their back who are then placed on their stomachs to sleep are at significantly higher risk for SIDS.
- **Sleep surface matters.** Infants who sleep *on top of* an adult bed or *under* soft surfaces (such as blankets or quilts) are at higher risk for SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death.

Communities across the nation have made great progress in sharing safe infant sleep messages! With your help, we can spread these important messages to every community in the nation.



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