

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden, unexplained death of a baby younger than 1 year. Most SIDS deaths occur in babies who are between 2 and 4 months old. In the United States, approximately 3000 infants die each year from SIDS.

The December 4, 2002, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about SIDS among Northern Plains Indians.



SIDS BASICS

Although much more research is needed, it is currently believed that SIDS results when a baby's body has difficulty regulating blood pressure, breathing, or temperature (or a combination of these things) because of an underlying vulnerability or developmental problem. When stressed by outside factors, including being put to sleep lying face down (on their stomachs), these babies can die of SIDS.

One thing parents can do to help prevent SIDS is to put babies to sleep on their backs, not stomachs. This helps babies breathe more easily and may prevent them from breathing their own carbon dioxide-rich exhaled air, which can collect under the baby's nose, especially if the baby is snuggling with a blanket, pillow, or stuffed animal. Babies should sleep in a room that is adequately warm, but pillows, quilts, stuffed animals, and other soft objects should be kept out of the crib. Researchers have found that babies who are usually put to sleep on their backs and then are put to sleep on their stomachs have a higher rate of death from SIDS. So you should always put your baby to sleep on his or her back.

FACTORS THAT INCREASE RISK FOR SIDS

- Placing the baby to sleep on his or her side or stomach
- Placing the baby to sleep on soft bedding
- Covering the baby with blankets
- Low birth weight
- Late or no prenatal care
- Smoking while pregnant and smoking in the baby's environment
- Alcohol or other drug abuse while pregnant
- Mother's age younger than 20 years

Babies should never be put to sleep unattended on adult furniture, such as sofas or beds, because the baby can become trapped in crevices or corners or under bed sheets and suffocate. If you sleep in the same bed with your baby, be sure that your bedding cannot trap the baby or block access to air. Also be sure that your baby cannot fall from the bed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Institute of Child Health & Human Development
800/370-2943
www.nichd.nih.gov
- American Academy of Pediatrics
847/434-4000
www.aap.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on *JAMA*'s Web site at www.jama.com. A Patient Page on delivering a healthy infant was published in the March 27, 2002, issue, and one on caring for a newborn baby was published in the September 22/29, 1999, issue.

Sources: National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, American Academy of Pediatrics

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