



## Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

### What is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) occurs when a baby dies suddenly while sleeping. It is also known as crib death. SIDS is most likely to occur in babies between 2 and 4 months of age, and the death remains unexplained even after a full autopsy.

### What causes SIDS?

The cause of SIDS is unknown. Some babies, such as premature babies and those with low birth weight are at higher risk of SIDS than others.

### What can I do to reduce the risk of SIDS?

#### **Put your baby to sleep on his or her back on the firm and flat surface of a safety-approved crib.**

Babies should always sleep in a crib made after 1986 that meets the federal government's Cribs, Cradles and Bassinets Regulations. Visit the Baby's Best Chance website for regulations at [www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca/pregnancy/preparing-for-babys-arrival/baby-safety/index.html](http://www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca/pregnancy/preparing-for-babys-arrival/baby-safety/index.html).

Babies who sleep on their backs in their own safety-approved cribs are at lower risk of SIDS than babies who sleep on their stomach or sides. Healthy babies and newborns do not choke or have other problems from sleeping on their backs.

When your baby can roll over on his own from his back to stomach, usually at 5-7 months of age, there is no need to continue to place him on his back if he turns over in his sleep.

When a baby is awake, he or she needs some 'tummy time'. Babies should be placed on their stomachs when caregivers are present and watching. Tummy time helps build babies' neck and shoulder muscles and prevent temporary flat spots that may develop on the back of a baby's head.

#### **Do not share a bed with your baby**

Babies who sleep in their own safety-approved crib are much safer than when they share a bed. Babies should always sleep in a crib until there is a possibility that the child could climb out on their own.

Bed-sharing is a common practice for many families. However, babies who sleep with adults, other children or pets are at risk of being smothered or being trapped between two surfaces. The risk of SIDS is greater for the baby when sharing a bed with a person who may be overweight, smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs which may make them less responsive.

Sharing a room helps protect your baby against SIDS, and it is a safer sleeping arrangement than sharing a bed. For the first 6 months, have your baby sleep in a crib in the same room where you sleep. For more information, see HealthLink BC File [#107 Safe Sleeping for Babies](#).

Share this information with anyone who may take care of your baby; it is important for all parents, babysitters and caregivers to be informed about how to reduce the risk of SIDS. For safe sleeping resource for parents and caregivers see **Every Sleep Counts!** at [http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2011/Every\\_sleep\\_counts\\_poster.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2011/Every_sleep_counts_poster.pdf).

**Keep your pregnancy smoke-free and give your baby a smoke-free environment.**

Cigarette smoke puts babies at higher risk of dying from SIDS. A baby exposed to second-hand smoke, or whose mother smoked before or after birth, has a much higher risk of SIDS. Do not let other people smoke around your baby, such as family members, friends or babysitters.

Speak with your doctor or public health nurse if you or your partner need help to quit smoking. You can also call the QuitNow helpline toll-free in B.C. by dialing 8-1-1 or visit [www.quitnow.ca](http://www.quitnow.ca).

**Keep your baby at a comfortable temperature - not too cold and not too hot.**

You know your baby is warm enough when your baby's head is warm. An over-heated baby has a higher risk of dying from SIDS.

Dress your baby in the same number of layers of clothing as you would wear, plus one more layer. Use only a light blanket to cover your baby. No two babies are alike and a baby's hands and feet are normally a little cool. Check the back of your baby's neck, and take off a layer if your baby is sweating there.

**Breastfeed your baby**

Babies who are breastfed may have a lower risk of dying from SIDS. Breastfeeding also gives your baby many long-term health, nutritional and psychological benefits, including a strong immune system.

Breastfeeding is easier when you share a room with your baby. This means your baby sleeps near you in a safe crib, allowing you to be close to your baby without sharing the same bed surface.

For help with breastfeeding, speak with your doctor, public health nurse, registered midwife, or local breastfeeding support group.

For more information about breastfeeding, see HealthLink BC File [#70 Breastfeeding](#).

**Do not use alcohol or drugs**

The use of certain drugs or substances during and after pregnancy is strongly discouraged. This includes alcohol, marijuana, crack, cocaine, heroin, and others. Evidence suggests that the use of these substances may increase the risk of SIDS.

If you or your partner needs support to stop using alcohol or drugs, call your local public health unit to find out about services in your area. You can also call the Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service: in Greater Vancouver call 604-660-9383, and in other areas of B.C. call toll-free 1-800-663-1441.

**If your baby has died from SIDS**

If you have lost a baby to SIDS, try to understand that not all cases of SIDS can be prevented. Following the tips in this HealthLink BC File can reduce the risks, but the causes of SIDS are still unknown. Remember, there are people who can help you during the time of your grief. Your doctor, public health nurse, or others can help you to find counseling or a parent support group.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm) or your local public health unit.

Click on [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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