



Sleep Related Infant Death

What is sleep related infant death?

There are two kinds of sleep related infant death.

The first is called Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS. SIDS occurs when a baby dies suddenly while sleeping, and the death remains unexplained even after a full autopsy. SIDS is most likely to occur in babies between 2 and 4 months of age.

The second kind of sleep related infant death is accidental. These deaths are usually caused by a healthy baby being smothered by items in the bed, such as pillows, toys, heavy blankets, or by a parent, child, or pet rolling onto the baby during sleep.

What causes SIDS?

The cause of SIDS is not fully understood but there are clear safe sleep practices that are known to reduce a baby's risk of SIDS. 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 sleep related infant death?

Put your baby to sleep on his or her back every time (at night and for naps)

Babies who sleep on their backs are at lower risk 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 or her own from back to stomach, you do not need to return them to their back for sleeping. Babies can usually roll over on their own at 5 to 7 months of age.

Place your baby on a firm surface that is free of hazards

Use a crib, cradle, or bassinet that has a firm mattress and a tight-fitting sheet. Do not use bumper pads or place pillows, heavy blankets, sheepskins or toys in the crib. Ensure the crib, cradle or bassinet meets Canadian safety regulations.

For more information about Canadian safety regulations and to check for product recalls, visit Health Canada - Consumer Product Safety at www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/consumer-product-safety.html. For more information on crib safety, see [HealthLinkBC File #107 Safe Sleeping for Babies](#).

Do not leave your baby to sleep alone on a chair, couch or adult bed. Sleeping with your baby on a chair or couch can also be dangerous.

Some babies fall asleep while travelling in a car seat. Keep an eye on a baby sleeping in the car and take your baby out of the car seat once you have reached your destination. Babies should not be left to sleep in a car seat, a stroller, baby swing, or bouncer seat because their airway may become restricted.

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

A baby exposed to second-hand smoke, or whose mother smoked before or after birth, has a much higher risk of SIDS.

Speak with your health care provider if you or your partner want help to reduce or stop your cigarette use. You can also call QuitNow helpline toll-free at 1 877 455-2233 in B.C. or visit www.quitnow.ca.

Share a room with your baby

Sharing a room helps protect your baby against sleep related infant death, and it is a safer sleeping arrangement than sharing a bed. For the first 6 months, have your baby sleep on a separate surface in the same room where you sleep. Many families choose to bedshare, or find that they end up bedsharing even if they did not plan to do so. There are ways to make bedsharing as safe as possible. For more information about the risks of bedsharing, see [HealthLinkBC File #107 Safe Sleeping for Babies](#).

Breastfeed your baby

Breastfeeding helps protect your baby against SIDS. Breastfeeding also helps protect your baby from many childhood illnesses.

Breastfeeding is easier when you share a room with your baby. This means your baby sleeps near you on a separate surface, allowing you to be close to your baby.

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

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

Keep your baby warm but not hot

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

The temperature of the room should be comfortable for an adult. A sleep sack, blanket-weight sleeper, or light blanket should be all that is needed to keep your baby warm. Do not swaddle your baby and do not use hats or toques indoors.

Stop or reduce your use of alcohol and other drugs

The use of certain substances during and after pregnancy may increase the risk of sleep related infant death. This includes alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), crack, cocaine, heroin, and others.

If you or your partner want support to reduce or stop your use of alcohol and other drugs, call the Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service: in Greater Vancouver call 604 660-9382 and in other areas of B.C. call toll-free 1 800 663-1441.

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 sleep related infant death.

What if my baby has died during sleep?

If your baby has died during sleep, remember that not all cases of sleep related infant death can be prevented. There are people who can help you during the time of your grief. Your health care provider can help you to find counselling or a parent support group. You can also call the BC Bereavement Helpline, toll free 1 877 779-2223 or visit www.bcbereavementhelpline.com.

For more information on a safe sleeping resource for parents and caregivers see Safer Sleep For My Baby at www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2017/safer-sleep-for-my-baby.pdf (PDF 2.08 MB)