

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.

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, see Resources.

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. For more information on quitting smoking see Resources.

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 [Resources](#).

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 [Resources](#).

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 - wrapping a baby up gently in a light, breathable blanket to help them feel calm and sleep - 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.

See [Resources](#) for more information if you or your partner want support to reduce or stop your use of alcohol and other drugs.

Share this information with anyone who may take care of your baby. All parents, babysitters and caregivers need to be informed about how to reduce the risk of sleep related infant death.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

For more information on:

- + 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.
- + Crib safety and bedsharing, see <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/safe-sleeping-babies>
- + Quitting smoking call QuitNow helpline toll-free at 1 877 455-2233 in B.C. or visit www.quitnow.ca.
- + Breastfeeding, see <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/breastfeeding>
- + Grief support call the BC Bereavement Helpline, toll free 1 877 779-2223 or visit www.bcbereavementhelpline.com.
- + Safe sleeping resource, 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)

Sleep Related Infant Death - *Continued*

TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to www.HealthLinkBC.ca

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in ___ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website:

www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/sleep-related-infant-death/

bcemn.ca

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