

Practice Note

Educating Parents on Safer Sleeping Environments for Infants

This practice note is to assist practitioners in providing information to the families with whom they work, to share with colleagues and other community professionals, and to support the work they do to keep children safe. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other infant deaths that occur during sleep are recognized as major public health concerns by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Researchers have identified risk factors in the infant sleeping environment that may contribute not only to SIDS, but to deaths from suffocation due to overlaying or entrapment. Factors associated with unsafe sleeping environments include infants sharing a sleeping surface with an adult or another child, and the presence of soft bedding (www.publichealth.gc.ca/safesleep).

Room-sharing vs. Bed-sharing

Bed-sharing refers to a sleeping arrangement in which the baby shares the same sleeping surface with another person. Room-sharing refers to a sleeping arrangement in which an infant is within arm's reach of his or her caregiver, but not on the same sleeping surface.

No sleep environment is completely risk-free, but much can be done to educate parents on the provision of safer sleeping environments for their infants. The advice we give must be guided by available evidence-based data, which indicate that when infants sleep in their own crib, they are significantly safer than when they bed-share (Canadian Pediatric Society).

Safe Sleeping Practice Tips¹:

- Advise parents that all infant sleep needs to be in a safe sleep environment at all times including night-sleeping and naps.
- Advise parents/caregivers to place infants alone, on their back, lightly clothed, on a firm mattress with a tight-fitting sheet, and in an age-appropriate crib/bassinet/cradle that meets current Health Canada safety regulations.
- Encourage parents/caregivers to practice room-sharing (sleeping in the same room, but on a separate sleep surface) with their infants for at least the first six months of life.
- Advise parents/caregivers that bed-sharing (sharing a sleep surface - including bed, mattress, sofa, arm chair, couch or futon) at any time with an infant can be hazardous because of the associated risks of accidental injury or death. Furthermore, the risk of SIDS and other deaths that occur during sleep increases when an infant shares a sleeping surface with a parent or caregiver who smokes, is impaired by alcohol or drugs including prescribed medication, is overly tired or obese².
- Educate parents/caregivers about the significant risk of sudden infant deaths that occurs within unsafe sleep environments, with potential risks due to overlay, suffocation, entrapment, wedging, decreased air flow, and over-heating (such environments include circumstances of bed-sharing).
- Remind parents/caregivers not to place any extra padding, bedding, pillows, toys or other objects under, on top of, or around the infant while sleeping.
- Advise parents/caregivers that car seats, strollers, swings, bouncy chairs etc are not designed, tested, or approved for safe infant sleep; the position of the infant's head while seated for extended periods may cause constriction of the airway.

¹ These tips are consistent with the Canadian Paediatric Society's recommendations, based on their review of the available scientific evidence.

² Obesity as a risk factor for unsafe sleep is consistent with the recommendation from the June 2007 Pediatric Death Review Committee and Deaths under Five Committee report.

December 2013



Additional Resources

There are numerous resources available to the public on safer sleeping environments for infants. Below is a list of some of the resources available to the public on safe sleeping environments for infants.

Public Health Agency of Canada

This website includes the Joint Statement on Safe Sleep: Preventing Sudden Infant Deaths in Canada, which provides health practitioners with current evidence so they may offer parents and caregivers' information and support, and raise awareness of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and safe sleep. It also includes links to a Safe Sleep for Your Baby brochure and video.

www.publichealth.gc.ca/safesleep

Health Canada

This website provides many helpful tips and resources around health concerns and healthy living. It also provides a searchable database of acts and regulations. The guide "Is Your Child Safe? Sleep Time" published in 2012 is available for download at:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/cons/child-enfant/sleep-coucher-eng.php>

www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Recalls and Safety Alerts Database of the Government of Canada

This database provides easy access to a comprehensive list of recalls, advisories, and safety alerts for various consumer and health products, food and vehicles. It includes recalls from Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Transport Canada.

[http://www.healthy Canad ians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/](http://www.healthy Canadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/)

Office of the Chief Coroner (PDRC Annual Reports)

Publications and reports on death investigations from the Office of the Chief Coroner can be found here, dating back to 2008.

http://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/DeathInvestigations/office_coroner/PublicationsandReports/OCC_pubs.html

Canadian Pediatric Society

This is a link to the Canadian Pediatric Society's position statement on recommendations for safer sleeping environments for infants and children.

<http://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/safe-sleep-environments-infants-children>

The Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths

This website provides safe sleep tips, information on creating a safe sleep environment for your baby and an online course, ABC's of Safe Sleep. Also available online is the Take the Safe Sleep Test.

<http://sidscanada.org/safesleep.html>

First Nations Health Authority (FHNA)

Resources on Safe Sleep, including Honouring Our Babies: Safe Sleep Cards & Guide. An interactive tool that incorporates cultural beliefs, practices, and issues specific to First Nations and Aboriginal communities.

<http://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/children-youth-and-maternal-health>