

Preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

What is SIDS?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the diagnosis given for the sudden death of an infant, 1-month to 1-year of age that remains unexplained after a complete investigation. The investigation includes an autopsy, examination of the death scene, a review of the child's symptoms or illness the infant had prior to the death and any other pertinent medical history. Because most cases of SIDS occur whenever the infant is sleeping in a crib, SIDS may also be known as crib death. The event may occur wherever the infant is sleeping, not necessarily in a crib.

SIDS can occur anytime between 1-month and 1-year of age, however 91% of the deaths occur before the age of 6-months, with the highest concentration between 2- and 4-months. There is an increase in these incidences in the winter months. It is more common with male children than female. SIDS happens suddenly and silently in a seemingly healthy infant. The death leaves many unanswered questions, causing intense grief for parents and families.

SIDS is Not:

SIDS is not hereditary, contagious, caused by immunizations, choking, suffocation, or apnea. It is not child abuse and not the reason for all unexpected infant deaths.

What are the risk factors?

- Mothers less than 20-years-old at the time of her first pregnancy
- Late or no prenatal care
- Premature or low birth weight infant
- Mother smoked during pregnancy, this increases risk by 3 times
- Smoking in environment after birth. Increases risk by 2 times
- Mother abused alcohol or drugs during pregnancy
- Infants who are placed to sleep on stomach

How can we reduce the risk of SIDS?

- Place infants on their backs for sleep. This includes naps. Do not place infants on their stomach to sleep.
- Place baby on a firm tight-fitting mattress in a crib that meets current safety standards.
- Do not place baby on a waterbed, sofa, beanbag, soft mattress, foam padding, or pillow to sleep.
- Use no soft bedding, pillows, sheepskins, stuffed toys, or other soft items in the crib.
- Make sure the baby's head remains uncovered during sleep.
- Avoid over-heating the baby. The temperature in the room should feel comfortable to an adult. Overdressing the baby should be avoided.
- Keep the baby in a smoke free environment.

What causes SIDS?

The cause remains a medical mystery, but mounting evidence from research suggests that some SIDS babies are born with brain abnormalities that make them vulnerable to sudden death during infancy. Studies of victim's show many have an abnormality in the brain that is likely to be involved in controlling breathing and waking during sleep.

Some things for caregivers to consider:

- If a parent of an infant is breast feeding, encourage them to provide bottled breast milk that is clearly labeled with the child's name for feeding
- Check the infant sleeping environment frequently to assure sheets are tight fitted and soft bedding or objects are not in the crib
- If you have a child in care with reflux, respiratory disease, or upper airway malformation, be sure to obtain information from the infants doctor on the recommended sleeping position
- If a child in your care is not breathing or is unresponsive, call 911; begin CPR and immediately notify the child's parents
- If a child in your center dies, do not disturb the scene of death; do not remove anything, if possible