

ActionAlert

Safe Sleep Education to Reduce Infant Deaths Due to Bed Sharing and SIDS

Expectation of all DHS staff and contracted provider staff:

Persuade parents and other caregivers that infants and toddlers under the age of one year must have and **consistently** use their own safe sleep area and ensure that other precautions are taken by parents and caregivers to lower the risk of Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (which includes SIDS) and accidental suffocation. For more information see: <http://www.achd.net/hvn/infantsleep.html>

Required action:

- * Check for a crib, bassinet, or pack 'n play as evidence of baby sleeping in his/her own safety-approved sleep area. If yes, 1) Is it in safe condition (in good repair, drop-down sides immobilized, free of objects of any kind, passes "pop can" test)? 2) Ask if the baby uses her/his own sleep area consistently.
 - * If there is no evidence of a separate safe sleep area for baby, raise the subject with parent(s) or caregiver in a culturally respectful way and ask if they prefer a crib or pack 'n play.
 - * Stress the importance of telling **all** caregivers about the risks associated with bed sharing and belly- or side-sleeping.
 - * Review Safe Sleep handout with parent or caregiver and post in a prominent place. Give extras if baby sleeps at other locations.
 - * Request a pack 'n play or safety-approved crib for the household.
-

Five themes cited by parents as motivations for bed sharing¹ and how to counter them...

- Better Sleep – Not every baby awakening requires attention. Research suggests that both infant and parent experience fewer nighttime awakenings when sleeping separately.
- Convenience – The value of convenience plummets if it risks the life of baby. **NOTE** If baby is brought into the mother's bed for breastfeeding, baby should be put back in his/her own safety – approved crib, bassinet, cradle or pack 'n play when finished.
- Tradition – The use of adult seat belts and child car seats was scoffed at just two generations ago. Now both are credited with saving many lives.
- Child Safety – There has been no increase in choking or other problems for babies who sleep on their backs since healthy babies automatically swallow or cough up fluids. On the contrary, a high percentage of infant deaths in Allegheny County are related to S.I.D.S. or bed sharing.
- Emotional Needs – Bonding with baby during "tummy time" and nursing (or feeding) when he/she is awake are excellent ways to satisfy the need to create and maintain the special bond of baby and parent. Tummy time is also important for strengthening upper body muscles and reducing flat spots on the baby's head.

Risks of bed sharing²

Increased risk of:

- S.I.D.S. because of the presence of soft bed linens and pillows
- Suffocation due to
 - being tangled in bed linens,
 - falling onto soft materials on the floor,
 - being wedged between the wall or other furniture and the bed, or
 - being crushed by parents who are sound sleepers.

1 Pitt Research Study [Kreps, G. & Lukasiak, M. (2009, May 11th). "Comforts, Dangers of Sharing your Bed with an Infant: Pitt Study Reveals why Parents, Despite Health Risks, Sleep with their Babies." *Pitt Chronicle*, pages 1-3.] <http://www.chronicle.pitt.edu/?p=2992>

2 Pregnancy and Newborn – March of Dimes Health Education Center www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/298_29656.asp