

# Safe Sleeping Practices for Infants

Denise Thomas of *SIDS and Kids* explains safe sleeping practices to prevent sudden infant death syndrome.

## What is SIDS?

SIDS is short for 'Sudden Infant Death Syndrome'. It means the sudden and unexpected death of a baby from no known cause.

## What are the risk factors for SIDS?

The most common risk factors include unsafe sleeping positions (tummy and side), head covering with bedding and exposure to tobacco smoke during pregnancy and/or after birth.

## Why are some infants at an increased risk of SIDS and fatal sleeping accidents?

Recent research has found that infants who are not accustomed to sleeping on the tummy and who are placed on the tummy to sleep for the first time are at very high risk of SIDS. It is very important to ensure that everyone who cares for young infants knows to put them on their back to sleep from birth.

## How can we reduce the risk?

- Sleep babies on the back from birth, not on the tummy or side.
- Sleep babies with face uncovered. Remove items that may cover the face (e.g. bumpers, doonas, pillows and soft toys). An infant sleeping bag is a good alternative to bedding. However, if you choose not to use a sleeping bag, make sure that blankets are lightweight and tuck them in firmly at the bottom of the cot.
- Find ways to keep babies away from cigarette smoke. Cigarette smoke harms babies before and after birth and significantly increases the risk of SIDS.
- Sleep babies in a safe cot with a firm, well-fitting mattress, use safe bedding and a safe sleeping environment.
- Never sleep babies on a pillow, beanbag, couch or waterbed.

## This article relates to:

**FDCQA:** Principle 4.5

**QIAS:** Principle 5.2, 6.5

## Is back sleeping safe?

Research shows that sleeping a baby on the back provides airway protection and that healthy babies placed to sleep on their back are less likely to choke on vomit than tummy sleeping infants.

Some babies might have to sleep on the side or the tummy for rare medical reasons. Sleep babies on their back, from birth, unless the child's medical practitioner advises in writing to do otherwise.

## What is a safe infant sleeping bag?

Safe infant sleeping bags have a fitted neck, fitted armholes and no hood. They are available in a range of sizes and warmth ratings. Dress the baby in as many clothes as is needed to keep warm under the sleeping bag and remove blankets.

## What should we do if a baby keeps rolling over onto the tummy?

Most SIDS occurs under 6 months of age. Try not to have baby sleep on their tummy before six months of age. Do this by sleeping baby on the back and try using a safe infant sleeping bag, as this may delay rolling over. Most back-sleeping babies can't roll onto their tummy by themselves until about 5-6 months of age.

## What should we do if a parent requests that an infant be put to sleep on the tummy or side?

Tell parents that putting infants to sleep on their tummy or side increases the risk of SIDS and that no baby should sleep in either position unless advised to do so in writing by a medical practitioner.

## Is prop feeding linked with SIDS?

Although there is no evidence that prop feeding causes SIDS, prop fed babies have choked and died. There is also evidence that this practice increases the incidence of ear infections and dental caries.

## What should we do if a parent requests that we use doonas or cot bumpers?

Tell parents that doonas, cot bumpers, pillows and lambs wools increase the risk of SIDS and other fatal sleep accidents. They should not be placed in an infant's cot.

It is important to discuss the SIDS and Kids Safe Sleeping recommendations with all parents and to inform them that unsafe sleeping practices will not be used in the centre, even if a parent requests it. Parents can be referred to SIDS and Kids for confirmation of the information.

To assist staff working in child care services, SIDS and Kids is developing resource kits, which will contain various safe sleeping literature including a policy, video, brochures and posters. The kits will also contain an action plan in the event of a sudden infant death, and other bereavement resources. These valuable kits should be available by the end of 2005. ■

**The Safe Sleeping program is based on scientific evidence and was developed by Australasian SIDS researchers, paediatricians, pathologists, and child health experts.**

**If you have further questions please contact SIDS and Kids on: 1300 308 307 or e-mail: [denisethomas@sidsandkids.org](mailto:denisethomas@sidsandkids.org)**