Fact Sheet

Back to sleep, baby

There is nothing sweeter than a sleeping newborn baby – little hands clenched tight and tiny whisper breaths. Tragically, every year 4,000 babies die unexpectedly while sleeping. Sometimes the cause is known, but other times healthy babies pass away suddenly for no clear reason. This is called Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS. SIDS is the leading cause of death for infants under one year old, and can be very frightening for parents, because it seems to strike for no reason.

Although experts are not exactly sure what causes SIDS, they do recommend safe sleep strategies parents can use to greatly reduce an infant's risk for SIDS.

- The most important protection against SIDS is **putting babies to sleep on their backs** for the first year. Since this recommendation was made in 1992, the rate of SIDS has dropped by half.
- Make sure babies have a **safe sleep environment**. Infants should sleep in the same room as their parents, but never in the same bed as adults or other children. An infant can be brought into a parent's bed for nursing or comforting, but he should be returned to his own bed before his parents go to sleep.
- Infants should sleep on a **firm mattress** and a sheet with fitted corners to sleep – never on a pillow, waterbed, sheepskin, couch, chair, or other soft surface. Blankets, comforters, stuffed toys, pillows and bumper pads should be kept out of the baby's crib.
- A baby should be dressed in **appropriate sleepwear** so he doesn't get too hot. Keep the room at a temperature that feels comfortable for an adult in a short-sleeve shirt.
- Make sure babies get **regular checks-ups** and recommended **immunizations**. Don't expose them to cigarette smoke. **Breastfeed**, and let babies over one month old have a pacifier to go to sleep.

Protect infants from SIDS by putting them on their back to sleep!

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