

# SAFE SLEEP FOR BABIES

## PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF

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### OVERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

Safe sleep practices are preventive measures that parents and caregivers can take to protect infants (0-1 year of age) from sleep-related causes of death.

The Safe to Sleep campaign started in 1994 and encouraged parents to have their infants sleep on their backs to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). This led to a dramatic 50% decline in SIDS deaths; however, the decline has unfortunately slowed since 2000.

### SAFE SLEEP REDUCES SIDS/SUID<sup>1, 2</sup>

A safe sleep environment can help reduce a baby's risk of sudden unexpected infant death (SUID), which includes SIDS and other accidental causes of infant death, such as choking and suffocation.

Every year, around 3,500 babies in the United States die suddenly and unexpectedly while they are sleeping. In Maryland, local Child Fatality Review (CFR) teams review an average of 53 sudden unexpected infant deaths each year.

While the exact cause of these deaths cannot always be determined, unsafe sleep factors are present in the majority of cases, indicating that deaths may potentially have been prevented if safe sleep practices were followed.

### RISK FACTORS<sup>2, 3</sup>

Risk factors for SUID include: low birth weight and preterm birth; non-supine sleeping position (baby sleeping on abdomen or side); unsafe sleeping environment with loose bedding or objects, bed-sharing, or co-sleeping arrangements; environmental risk factors, such as smoking or drug exposure.

Families of color are disproportionately impacted by sleep-related SUID deaths. In Maryland, the SUID rate among non-Hispanic Black infants was over two times greater than the rate among non-Hispanic White infants. The SUID rate among non-Hispanic Black infants was more than five times greater than the rate among Hispanic infants.

### ABCS OF SAFE SLEEP<sup>4, 5</sup>

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends the following ABCs of Safe Sleep to reduce the risk of sudden unexpected infant deaths:

**ALONE:** Share your room, but not your bed, with baby.

**BACK:** Safest position for baby to sleep is on their back, as this helps baby breathe more easily.

**CRIB:** Keep baby's sleeping place clean and clear with just a tight-fitting sheet on a firm mattress.

### DATA<sup>2</sup>

#### Number of Unexpected Child Deaths by Jurisdiction of Residence, Maryland, 2015-2019

- Harford County: 30
- Maryland: 952

#### Number of Sudden, Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUIDs) by Jurisdiction of Residence, Maryland 2015-19

- Harford County: 4
- Maryland: 264

#### Characteristics of Sudden, Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUIDs), Maryland, 2015-2019

- Soft object in sleeping area: 71%
- Infant slept in adult bed: 51%
- Infant found on abdomen or side: 36%

### SPOTLIGHT:<sup>6</sup>

In June 2022, AAP updated its recommendations for reducing infant deaths in the sleep environment, including:  
**Back to sleep for every sleep.**

**Sleep Surfaces:** Use a firm, flat, non-inclined sleep surface (inclines >10 degrees are unsafe for infant sleep). Avoid using devices such as car seats, strollers, swings, infant carriers, and infant slings as routine places to sleep, particularly for infants <4 months.

**Crib:** A crib that meets the safety standards of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is recommended.

**Breastfeeding:** Feeding of human milk is recommended because it is associated with a 50% reduced risk of SIDS.

**Sleep Location:** Infants should sleep in the parents' room, close to the parents' bed, but on a separate surface designed for infants, ideally for at least the first 6 months. This decreases the risk of SIDS by as much as 50%. Sleeping on couches and armchairs places infants at extraordinarily high risk, an up to 67 times increased risk for infant death.

**Soft Bedding:** Keep baby's sleep area clear of soft objects and loose bedding. Avoid crib bumpers. Avoid placing weighted blankets, weighted sleepers, weighted swaddles, or other weighted objects on or near a sleeping infant.

**Exposure to Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs:** Avoid exposure during pregnancy and after birth.

**Overheating and Head Covering:** Avoid over-bundling and covering of the infant's face and head, as studies have shown an increased risk of SIDS with overheating.

**Cardiorespiratory monitors:** Avoid the use of commercial home devices that claim to reduce the risk of SIDS or other sleep-related deaths.

**Tummy time:** Parents are encouraged to place the infant in tummy time while awake and supervised for short periods of time.

**Swaddling:** There is no evidence to recommend swaddling as a strategy to reduce the risk of SIDS.

#### Sources:

1. CDC Vital Signs: Safe Sleep for Babies. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/safesleep/index.html>

2. Maryland State Child Fatality Review Team: 2020 Annual Legislative Report. <http://phpa.health.maryland.gov/mch/Pages/cfr-home.aspx>

3. CDC: About SUID and SIDS. <https://www.cdc.gov/sids/about/index.htm>

4. AAP: Safe Sleep. <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/safe-sleep/>

5. MDH: Safe Sleep. <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/mch/Pages/cfr-home.aspx>

6. Moon R et al. "Sleep-related infant deaths: updated 2022 AAP recommendations for reducing infant deaths in the sleep environment." Pediatrics. July 2022.