

# Safe sleeping for infants

## Information for parents and caregivers

In the 20 years between 1985 and 2005, deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in Australia fell by 83%. Research suggests that to a large extent, this was due to parents placing their babies to sleep on their back, rather than on their side or tummy.

Although the number of SIDS cases has decreased dramatically, the current trend, both in Australia and overseas, shows an increase in deaths associated with babies in unsafe sleeping environments. That is, co-sleeping situations with parents, using u-shaped pillows to prop sleeping children up, and dangling curtain and blind cords near cots. These types of deaths are preventable.

Infants are not able to control their own sleeping environment. They are reliant on parents and caregivers to keep them safe. They do not understand danger, nor can they usually move out of a dangerous situation.

There are positive steps that can be taken to make sleeping environments safer for infants.

### Provide a safe sleeping environment for infants

An easy to remember message is:

**Back to sleep, tummy to play,  
sit up to watch the world**

- Sleep babies on their back from birth – never on their tummy or side.
- Sleep babies with their head and face uncovered, with their feet at the foot of the cot. Don't use quilts, doonas, duvets, pillows, cot bumpers, and sheep skins, or place soft toys in the cot.
- Tuck bedding in securely so it is not loose, or sleep the baby in a sleeping bag that is the right weight for the season and fits the neck firmly.
- Avoid exposing babies to tobacco smoke during pregnancy and after birth. Avoid smoke in the air around babies, and on your clothes.
- Sleep babies in their own cot or bassinette in the same room as you for the first 6–12 months, not in the bed with you.

- Provide a safe sleeping place night and day in a cot that meets the Australian Standards for Household Cots (AS/NZS 2172), and is positioned away from blind/curtain cords and other hazards.
- Make sure portable cots meet the mandatory Australian Standard (AS/NZS 2195–1999).
- Use a firm, clean mattress that fits the cot snugly with no gaps of more than 20mm at the sides and ends.
- Make sure that no additional mattresses or extra padding are placed in cots, including porta cots.
- Keep the cot or bassinette away from curtain/blind cords – young children have been strangled by dangling curtain and blind cords.
- Don't let babies sleep on couches, bean bags, pillows or even baby capsules placed on the floor.

### Some extra tips

- An infant sleeping bag that is the correct size and weight for the season, with a fitted neck, arm holes and no hood, is a safe and effective way to keep a baby's head and face uncovered. Using an infant sleeping bag does away with extra unnecessary bedding, which could potentially pose as a suffocation hazard. (These types of sleeping bags can be purchased from Kidsafe SA).
- Bouncinettes, prams, strollers, hammocks, baby swings, and car seats have NOT been designed for safe sleeping. No young child should be left unsupervised in these if they fall asleep.

For more information, contact:

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