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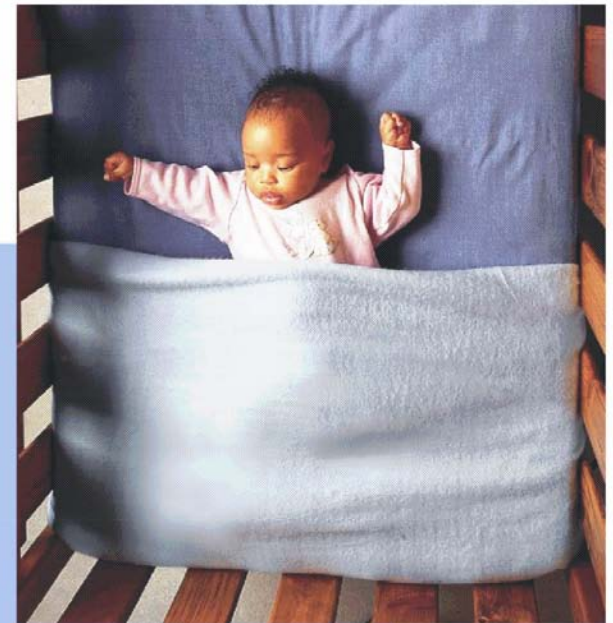
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A SAFE-SLEEP ENVIRONMENT FOR INFANTS



GUIDELINES FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

A SAFE-SLEEP ENVIRONMENT FOR INFANTS

Guidelines for Healthcare Professionals

Purpose:

To describe an environment which reduces the risk of injury and death to infants when sleeping; the description will be acceptable to and promoted by all Allegheny County healthcare professionals. So that safe-sleep education for parents and other caregivers is consistent and repetitive, child care providers, home visitors and other stakeholders will receive information on the core elements of this safe-sleep description and reinforce it when interacting with parents and other caregivers.

Infant Care Practices and Standards for a Safe-Sleep Environment:

Position Statement: All babies, regardless of sleep location, should be positioned on their backs for sleep. Many experts believe that infants should sleep in their own sleeping space such as a crib, bassinet, portable crib or sidecar in the same room with the parent/s during the early months. A mother who elects to bed share with her infant must receive guidance on how to make the adult bed as safe as possible. Helping parents and primary care givers establish a safe sleeping environment for the infant is an important public health function and a responsibility of all healthcare professionals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Allegheny County PPOR Team has been diligently working to reduce the risks of fetal and infant deaths. One of its first initiatives is to reduce the risk of deaths related to SIDS and other unexpected infant deaths after the first month of life. The vision is for every Allegheny County family with a newborn to receive clear, consistent, repetitive, and culturally appropriate information regarding a safe-sleep environment for their baby. After numerous community meetings and lively communications, we were able to reach consensus on safe-sleep guidelines and produce this document. The PPOR Team appreciates the time and effort of the many community groups and individuals who worked with them to reach consensus and wishes to thank them for uniting in our joint quest of assuring healthy birth outcomes for all infants born in Allegheny County. Thanks also to PPOR Team members who gave so generously of their time and knowledge.

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In Order To Reduce The Risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) And To Prevent Suffocation...

➤ PLACE HEALTHY INFANTS TO SLEEP ON THEIR BACKS.

Why? Babies put to sleep on their backs are less likely to die from SIDS or accidental suffocation than babies placed on their tummies or sides. (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 11, 12, 13,14, 20, 22, 29)

➤ SET UP THE INFANT'S OWN SAFE SLEEPING AREA IN THE SAME ROOM WITH THE PARENTS DURING THE EARLY MONTHS.

Why? Studies indicate that more infants die during their sleep when they are in a room by themselves than when they share a room with their parents. (4, 21, 23, 27, 29)

➤ PLACE HEALTHY INFANTS IN CRIBS THAT MEET THE MINIMUM FEDERAL SAFETY STANDARDS. (24, 29)

Why? A crib meeting federal safety standards is the safest place for baby to sleep. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is an independent federal regulatory agency charged with ensuring the safety of consumer goods. CPSC administers mandatory standards for cribs which include:

- No more than 2 3/8 inches between the crib slats so a baby's head or body cannot fit through the slats; no missing or cracked slats.
- A firm, tight fitting mattress so baby cannot get trapped between mattress and crib. Mattress should fit snugly - less than the width of two fingers between the edge of the mattress and the side of the crib.
- No missing, loose, broken, or improperly installed screws, brackets, or other hardware on the crib or mattress support.
- No corner posts over 1/16 th inch high so a baby's clothing cannot catch.
- No cutouts in the headboard or foot board so a baby's head cannot get trapped.

The CPSC recommends not placing a crib near draperies or blinds where a child could become entangled and strangle on the cords. When the child reaches 35 inches in height, or can climb and/or fall over the sides, the crib should be replaced with a bed.

IN ADDITION TO USING A SAFE CRIB, REMEMBER TO:

✓ USE A FIRM, TIGHT-FITTING MATTRESS AND A TIGHT-FITTED BOTTOM SHEET SPECIFICALLY MADE FOR THE CRIB.

Why? Baby may suffocate on a soft mattress, get trapped between the mattress and the crib or may get entangled with the sheet, if it becomes loose. Never use an adult sheet on a crib mattress. (24, 29)

✓ REMOVE ALL SOFT OR LOOSE BEDDING INCLUDING QUILTS, COMFORTERS, BUMPER PADS, PILLOWS, STUFFED ANIMALS AND SOFT TOYS FROM THE SLEEPING AREA.

Why? Baby may suffocate with the soft and/or loose bedding. (1, 2, 12, 14, 22, 29)

✓ USE A SLEEPER OR SLEEP SACK INSTEAD OF BLANKETS.

Why? Baby may get strangled or entangled with a loose fitting sheet or blanket. If a blanket must be used, place baby with feet to foot of the crib; tuck a thin blanket around the crib mattress, covering baby only as high as his/her chest. (1, 3, 29)

✓ DRESS THE INFANT IN A MANNER TO AVOID OVER-BUNDLING OR OVER-HEATING; SET ROOM TEMPERATURE, IF POSSIBLE, AT A COMFORTABLE LEVEL.

Why? Caregivers are encouraged to dress the baby as the caregiver would dress for sleep. It is unclear whether clothing and climate are independent factors, or are a reflection of the various suffocating objects in the sleeping environment. (2, 11, 12, 14, 29)

➤ NEVER PLACE AN INFANT TO SLEEP ON A COUCH, SOFA, RECLINER, CUSHIONED CHAIR, WATERBED, BEANBAG CHAIR, SOFT MATTRESS, PILLOW, SYNTHETIC OR NATURAL ANIMAL SKINS (SUCH AS LAMB-SKINS), OR OTHER SOFT SURFACE SUCH AS "MEMORY" FOAM MATTRESS TOPPERS AND PILLOWS DESIGNED FOR ADULTS.

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Why? Sleeping on any of these puts the infant at great risk for suffocation as these items have high wedging and trapping potential. These risks are even greater when an infant sleeps with any other person on any of these surfaces. (2, 4, 22, 23, 27, 29)

► **INFANTS SHOULD BE BREASTFED FOR AT LEAST THE FIRST SIX MONTHS.**

Why? Studies suggest that breastfeeding and/or factors associated with breastfeeding may be protective against SIDS. Since breastfeeding is associated with a reduction in risk for postneonatal deaths overall, providers are encouraged to discuss various infant safe sleep options with the mother to assist the breastfeeding dyad with a successful and pleasurable experience. (2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18, 26, 28, 29)

► **INFANTS SHOULD ALWAYS SLEEP IN A SMOKE-FREE HOME OR ENVIRONMENT.**

Why? Smoking, both maternal and environmental, has been shown to be a risk factor for SIDS. (8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29)

► **PRONE (ON STOMACH) POSITIONING WHEN AWAKE, OFTEN CALLED SUPERVISED TUMMY TIME, IS ESSENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SHOULDER GIRDLE AND ARM STRENGTH, HEAD CONTROL AND STABILITY OF THE TRUNK.**

Why? This development provides the foundation for emerging motor skills such as sitting, crawling and transitioning. Furthermore, supervised tummy time will prevent the infant from developing positional plagiocephaly (flat head). When discussing safe sleep environments, it is crucial for providers to emphasize these facts with families in order to ensure appropriate infant developmental progress. (1, 29)

Remember: These infant care practices and standards apply for all nap times and for sleeping at night.

BED SHARING:

Some families wish to practice bed sharing based on their cultural beliefs, environmental situation or other personal reasons. All families must be aware that there are risks involved with sleeping in the same bed with their infant. (13, 22, 23, 27, 29)

- ★ Adult beds are not designed to meet federal safety standards for infants.
- ★ Babies have been suffocated by becoming trapped or wedged between the bed and the wall or bed frame, have been injured by rolling off the bed, or have been suffocated by bedding.
- ★ Infants have died when an adult rolled onto and suffocated them.

Because of these concerns, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Allegheny County PPOR Team recommend that infants not bed share during sleep. Bed sharing is especially risky and **must** be avoided at all times when a mother or any other person is...

- ★ Extremely fatigued (4)
- ★ Obese (25)
- ★ A smoker (4, 5, 11, 20, 21)
- ★ Impaired by alcohol or drugs, legal or illegal (4,13)

Sleeping with a baby under these conditions is extremely dangerous and may lead to the baby's death.

If a mother decides to bed share despite the above warnings, offer this additional guidance:

- ✓ Use a crib or “sidecar” next to mother’s bed. A sidecar is a crib-like infant bed that attaches securely and safely next to the parent’s bed; with this nighttime nurturing device, parents have their own sleeping space, baby has his or her own sleeping space, and baby and parents are in close touching and nursing distance to one another.
- ✓ Place infant back to crib after comforting or breastfeeding and/or when the parent is ready to sleep.
- ✓ Sleep with the baby on an extra firm mattress on the floor to minimize falls.
- ✓ Keep the firm mattress away from walls or hazardous items such as curtains, blinds, heaters, and windows.

- ✓ Avoid crevices between the mattress and wall.
- ✓ Avoid side rails, head-boards and foot-boards that have slats that could entrap the baby’s head.
- ✓ Never let the baby share a bed with a sibling, baby sitter or person other than parent. (2)
- ✓ Reinforce the infant care practices and standards which are stated above under the heading “To Reduce the Risk of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) and Prevent Suffocation”.

BASSINET, CRADLE OR PORTABLE CRIB:

These small beds are helpful and portable in the first few months. Although many cradles and bassinets provide a safe sleeping enclosure, safety standards have not been established for these items. When using a portable crib or playpen, use only the mattress or pad provided by the manufacturer. The CPSC recommends following the manufacturer’s guidelines on weight and size of the baby in determining who can safely use these products. For safety reasons, be sure to look for a bassinet or cradle with the following: a sturdy bottom and a wide base for stability, smooth surfaces (no protruding staples or other hardware that may injure the baby), legs with strong, effective locks to prevent folding while in use, and a firm mattress that fits snugly.

Resources:

For help with getting a crib, call:
Cribs for Kids-(412) 322-5680

For help with breastfeeding, call:
Breastfeeding Help Line-(412) 247-1000

For help to stop smoking call:
Tobacco Free Allegheny-(412) 322-8321

For help with mother and baby support/guidance:
ACHD MCH Program-(412) 247-7950 or
Healthy Start Help Line-(412) 247-1000

For confidential information, referral, and support
for any non-medical parenting question, call:
Parenting WARMLINE at Family Resources-(800) 641-4546