
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

SIDS is a term used to describe the sudden, unexplained death of an infant that remains unexplained after a thorough case investigation that includes a complete autopsy, an examination of the death scene and a review of the clinical history. SIDS is the leading cause of death of children 1 month to 1 year of age. In the United States, approximately 2,500 infant deaths are attributed to SIDS each year. Many (nearly 20 percent) of these occur in the child care setting.

The cause of SIDS is unknown. SIDS is not contagious. SIDS is not caused by vomiting, choking or minor illnesses such as colds or infections. Deaths due to vaccine reactions or child abuse are not classified as SIDS deaths. While we don't know what causes SIDS, some factors that are associated with increased risk of SIDS are:

- 1.) Placing a baby on the stomach (prone position) to sleep, especially if the baby is not used to tummy sleeping;
- 2.) Being exposed to tobacco smoke during pregnancy and after birth;
- 3.) Using soft surfaces and objects that trap air or gases such as pillows, in a baby's sleeping area; and
- 4.) Not breastfeeding a baby. However, risk factors alone do not cause SIDS. Most babies with one or more of the above risk factors do not succumb to SIDS.

To decrease the risk of SIDS in the child care setting

- Always place babies on their backs to sleep, unless the child's physician has written and signed a note stating the medical reason for why the baby should not sleep on his or her back.
- Place babies in a safety-approved crib with a firm mattress to sleep. Adult beds, water beds, sofas and chairs are not safe because infants can accidentally suffocate. Place only one baby in a crib at a time.
- Remove soft, fluffy bedding and toys such as pillows, bumper pads, comforters and stuffed animals. These soft items can interfere with a baby's ability to breathe if they get near his or her face.
- If blankets are used, follow the "feet-to-foot" rule. Place the baby in the crib with his or her feet at the foot of the crib. Tuck a light blanket in along the sides and foot of the mattress, with the blanket coming up no higher than the baby's chest.
- Provide supervised "tummy time" when infants are awake. This helps babies to strengthen their head and neck muscles. Never leave babies unattended on their tummies, though, unless they are able roll back and forth on their own.

- Don't smoke; provide a smoke-free environment for babies in your care; encourage parents who smoke to quit. Babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy are three times more likely to die of SIDS. Babies exposed to secondhand smoke are at 2.5 times the risk.
- Encourage mothers who breastfeed to provide you with bottled breast milk that is clearly labeled with their child's name. Studies show that babies who died of SIDS were less likely to have been breastfed. Breastfeeding also prevents gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses and infections.

If a child in your care is not breathing and is unresponsive:

- Call 911.
- Begin rescue breathing/CPR.
- Immediately notify the child's parents.

If a child in your care dies:

- Do not disturb the scene of death (i.e., don't move anything), if possible.
- Get help to care for the other children.
- Call the parents of the other children.
- Document the entire sequence of events.
- Notify your licensing and/or certification agency and insurance agency
- Prepare to talk with law enforcement officers, a coroner or medical examiner and licensing and insurance agencies.

If the death of a child in your care is attributed to SIDS:

- Seek support and SIDS information from your local health department or from local, state or national SIDS resources.
- Provide information on SIDS to families in your program, including age-appropriate resources for children.
- Offer support resources for families, such as counseling services, publications, web sites, support groups, etc.

For additional information on SIDS, including free prevention materials and support resources, contact:

- **National Institute of Child Health & Human Development Back to Sleep campaign**
800-505-CRIB (2742)
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov>
- **American Academy of Pediatrics**
888-227-5409 or 847-434-4915
<http://www.healthychildcare.org>
- **CJ Foundation for SIDS**
888-8CJ-SIDS (825-7437)
<http://www.cjsids.com>
- **National SIDS/Infant Death Resource Center**
866-866-7437
<http://www.sidscenter.org>
- **First Candle/SIDS Alliance**
800-221-7437 or 410-653-8226
<http://www.sidsalliance.org>
- **Sudden Infant Death Network of Ohio**
800-477-7437
<http://www.sidsohio.org/>