



# SAFE SLEEP



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Caring for a new baby can be hard for parents and caregivers. When babies wake up often or fuss during the night, nobody gets any sleep.

When you are tired, it may seem easier to bring your baby to bed with you. But sharing a sleep surface (e.g., bed, sofa or chair) with your baby can be dangerous — your baby may be injured or worse.

Every year about 50 babies in New York City die from a sleep-related injury due to unsafe sleep practices such as stomach sleeping and bed-sharing. That's almost one baby every week. The good news is these deaths are mostly preventable.

## What Is a Sleep-Related Injury Death?

A **sleep-related injury death** is the sudden death of an infant less than 1 year old that occurs because of where and/or how they were placed to sleep. In these cases, an item like a loose blanket, pillow or another person caused the baby to suffocate and die. Babies placed to sleep on their stomachs can also suffocate if they get trapped and are unable to move their nose and mouth away from the mattress, soft bedding or other objects in the crib, such as stuffed animals.

Sleep-related infant injury death is not the same as **SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome)** or “crib death.” SIDS is the natural death of a baby that cannot be explained after a careful medical review of the case. Unlike SIDS, sleep-related injury deaths involve accidents that can be explained and are mostly preventable.

All babies, from birth to 12 months old, are at risk for sleep-related injury deaths. **However, babies between 1 and 4 months old are at the greatest risk.** Around this age, babies' neck muscles are still very weak and it is hard for them to move out of dangerous situations. Babies also start trying to roll over during this time, but cannot do it well on their own. For these reasons, it is very important to follow infant safe sleep guidelines.



## Frequently Asked Questions About Infant Safe Sleep

**Q:** How can I reduce my baby's chances of dying from a sleep-related injury?

**A:** The best way to reduce your baby's risk of a sleep-related injury death is to place them — day or night — to sleep alone, on their back, on a firm mattress and in a safety-approved crib, bassinet, portable crib or play yard. Cover the mattress with a fitted sheet only and do not place loose blankets, pillows, toys or bumper pads in the sleep area. To check if your crib meets safety standards, call the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) at 800-638-2772, or visit [cpsc.gov](http://cpsc.gov) and search for “cribs.”

**Q:** I have poor heating in my apartment, and I don't want my baby to be cold in their crib. How do I keep them warm if I don't sleep with them or cover them with a blanket?

**A:** If you are worried about your baby getting cold, dress them in a wearable blanket, such as a sleep sack, or in another layer of infant clothing. In general, your baby should be dressed with only one more layer than what you are wearing. If your landlord does not address the heating issue, call 311 for help.

**Q:** My mother shared a bed with me when I was a baby with no problems. Why should I do anything differently for my baby?

**A:** What we know about sharing a sleep surface with babies has changed over the years. In the past, many sleep-related injury deaths were thought to be caused by SIDS (a natural cause of death). Now we know that many babies die from accidental suffocation while sleeping in unsafe spaces, especially when sharing a bed with another person. These deaths are mostly preventable.



# Infant Safe Sleep Guidelines

The American Academy of Pediatrics reviews the latest research and offers guidelines for where and how to safely place your baby to sleep. The most recent guidelines came out in October 2016 and include this advice:

- **Babies should be placed on their backs to sleep until their first birthday** — for naps and at night. Babies can breathe better on their backs than on their stomachs or sides. Sleeping on their backs opens up their chests and makes it easier for them to draw in more oxygen to their brains. Babies who sleep on their sides can more easily roll onto their stomachs, increasing their risk of suffocation.
- **Babies are MORE likely to choke on their vomit when placed on their stomachs.** When babies sleep on their backs and vomit, they naturally swallow or cough up the fluid, and turn their heads so it rolls down the side of their face. When babies sleep on their stomachs and vomit, they can breathe in the vomit and choke.
- **Use a firm sleep surface with a fitted sheet made for that specific product.** A crib, bassinet, portable crib or play yard that meets Consumer Product Safety Commission standards is recommended. Babies should be placed on a flat surface for all sleep times. Though it might seem more comfortable to put a pillow on top of the mattress, babies may suffocate on the soft surface.
- **Do not use a car seat, carrier, swing, bouncer or similar product as a sleep area.** These products are not made for babies to sleep in and are dangerous because babies are not sleeping flat on their backs. If babies fall asleep in these items, they should be moved to a firm sleep surface on their backs as soon as possible.
- **Never place your baby to sleep on a couch, sofa or chair.** These surfaces are not designed for a baby to sleep on and are very dangerous. A baby can easily get trapped between cushions, people or other objects that can cause him or her to suffocate.
- **Keep your baby's sleep area near your bed for the first 6 to 12 months.** Place your baby's crib, bassinet, portable crib or play yard next to your bed. This is called room sharing and it will make it easier for you to feed, comfort and watch your baby without increasing the risk of sleep-related injury death.
- **Avoid sharing a bed with your baby.** Your baby should never sleep in an adult bed, on a couch or on a chair with you or anyone else (e.g., other children or pets). Babies may suffocate if another person accidentally rolls on top of them or covers their nose and mouth.

- **Keep soft objects, loose bedding or any other items that could increase the risk of suffocation out of the baby's sleep area.** Do not place pillows, blankets, toys or bumper pads anywhere in your baby's sleep area. These objects can cover a baby's face, causing them to suffocate.
- **Breastfeed your baby.** Breastfeeding has many health benefits for mother and baby, including reducing the risk of SIDS. While the cause of SIDS is unknown, breast milk may help build a baby's immune system to fight SIDS-related infections. Babies fed only breast milk get the most protection against SIDS. However, any breastfeeding provides more protection than no breastfeeding at all. Breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact also keep babies calm, and can help mothers bond with their babies and regulate their body temperatures, breathing and heart rate.
- **If you bring your baby into bed with you to feed or comfort them, make sure you put them back in their bed before you fall asleep.** Placing your baby's crib next to your bed can help make this easier. If you fall asleep in bed with your baby while feeding or comforting them, place them back to sleep in their own crib as soon as you wake up.



**NO PILLOWS**



**NO BLANKETS**



**NO TOYS**



**NOT ON  
THEIR BELLY**



**NOT IN BED  
WITH YOU**



**Q:** I don't drink or use drugs, so aren't I less likely to smother my baby in bed?

**A:** No. Innocent mistakes can happen. Even parents who do not drink or use drugs can accidentally smother their babies in bed. Bed-sharing can be dangerous for any family.

**Q:** How can I breastfeed my baby in the middle of the night if I can't bring him into bed with me?

**A:** Parents are encouraged to have the baby's crib right next to their bed. You may bring your baby into bed with you for feeding or for comfort. However, it is important for you to place your baby back in their own crib before you fall asleep.

**Q:** Car seats are safety approved. Can they also be a safe place for my baby to sleep?

**A:** No. Because babies don't lie flat in car seats, they can suffocate when their heads (which are very heavy compared to the rest of their bodies), tip forward, blocking their airway.

**Q:** What if my baby rolls onto his stomach while he's sleeping? Do I need to put him on his back again?

**A:** Rolling over is an important and natural part of your baby's growth. Most babies start rolling over on their own around 4 to 6 months of age. If your baby rolls onto their stomach on their own during sleep, you do not need to turn them over onto their back. The important thing is for them to start off on their back. However, swaddled babies are at high risk for suffocation if they roll onto their stomachs. Stop swaddling babies as soon as they start trying to roll. This usually begins at around 2 months of age.

**Q:** What can I do to protect my sleeping baby from mice, cockroaches and other pests?

**A:** Keep your baby's crib free of any food or drink that may attract pests. Crib netting may also provide some protection. For more on how to control pests safely, visit [nyc.gov](https://nyc.gov) and search for **pests**. If you have pest problems in your home and your landlord does not correct them, call **311** for help.

For more information visit [nyc.gov/safesleep](https://nyc.gov/safesleep)