

FACT SHEET: Safer Sleeping for Babies/Infants

The issue of safer sleeping for babies and infants has been identified as a national issue since Local Safeguarding Children Boards began to review all child deaths in their area in April 2008.

Some infant deaths have been confirmed as being caused through sleeping in the same bed, or on a sofa, with an adult/s or an older child. Also, some unexplained infant deaths recorded as “unascertained” or “sudden infant deaths (SIDS)” featured bed-sharing with an adult at the time of death, but bed-sharing could not be confirmed as the direct cause. Although it is not yet known how to completely prevent SIDS, one of the possible ways to significantly reduce the risks in the first 6 months is by placing infants to sleep in a separate cot or Moses basket in the same room as a parent or carer.

Definitions

Literature might use a combination of these but in order to be consistent with ISIS (Infant Sleep Information Source) local professionals should use the following language:

- ❖ **SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome):** the sudden and unexplained death of an infant where no cause is found.
- ❖ **Co-sleeping:** parents and infants sleeping in close proximity, but not necessarily on the same surface
- ❖ **Bed sharing:** infants sleeping for at least some of the night in the same bed as an adult or older child
- ❖ **Overlaying:** this is sometimes described as a cause or probable cause of death. The term implies that the infant has been laid on or squashed, but an adult, older child or pet sleeping with an infant can restrict an infant’s airway and stop them from breathing in other ways, such as lying with their face pressed against a part of the body, or a limb resting across an infant’s chest.

For further details see:

- www.lullabytrust.org.uk – prevention of SIDS research and safer sleep advice
- www.isisonline.org.uk – infant sleep information service for parents and carers

Risk Factors

- ❖ Infants who sleep in bed or on the sofa with adults, older children or pets
- ❖ Alcohol consumption, use of medication or drugs can affect a parent/carer’s arousal and awareness
- ❖ Putting young infants to sleep on their front, particularly those born with low birth weight (less than 2.5 kg/5½lb), prematurely (less than 37 weeks)
- ❖ Smoking by parent/carer in the household
- ❖ A tired parent/carer
- ❖ Use of pillows and adult bedding which can cover an infant or cause them to overheat. Soft toys in the cot can cause an airway obstruction.

Safety Tips

This advice is for all naps, not just for night time sleep:

- ❖ **The safest place** for an infant to sleep for the first 6 months is in a separate cot or Moses basket in the same room as a parent or carer
- ❖ Not all babies need a **dummy** but if you do use one it needs to be used for all sleep periods
- ❖ **Always** place your baby on their backs to sleep and in the feet to foot position
- ❖ **Breastfeeding** reduces the risk of SIDS. More information can be obtained from your Health Visitor or Midwife on how to breastfeed your baby safely whilst in bed.
- ❖ There are **more steps** that can be taken to help reduce infant deaths from SIDS and these are available from the websites listed or from a local midwife or health visitor.

National research and local data

15 child deaths reviewed in Hull between April 2008 and December 2016 featured characteristics associated with increased risk of sudden infant death, and the findings from these reviews were:

- ❖ 2 deaths were caused through “Probable overlaying”, 7 were “unascertained” and 6 had medical/natural causes
- ❖ 12 infants were from a smoking household
- ❖ 9 involved parental alcohol and/or drug use before bed
- ❖ 5 infants were in bed with a parent/s, 4 were sleeping on a sofa with a parent/s, 3 were found laid on their front, 2 cots used adult bedding, 2 were found with soft toys near their face, 2 were sleeping in a car seat.



For details of training for professionals on infant safer sleep, please call City Health Care Partnership on 335703 or visit the Hull Safeguarding Children Board website [See over page for other useful contacts.](#)

Community Midwifery - 382658 or 382742

Health Visiting:

West/Riverside/Marmaduke - 347964

West/Calvert - 344041

North/Orchard - 477752

East/Marfleet - 344301

ISIS Online - Infant Sleep Information Source (information for parents and carers, including an iPhone app)

www.isisonline.org.uk

The Lullaby Trust - 0808 802 6869

www.lullabytrust.org.uk

Hull Safeguarding Children Board - 379090

www.hullsafeguardingchildren.co.uk