

Maryland's Safe Sleep Program Bans Crib Bumpers and Fights Health Disparities

As the first state to ban crib bumpers, Maryland fights Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and infant mortality disparities with partnerships and legislation.

Data from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (MDDHMH) revealed disparities between African American and white infant mortality rates. In 2007, the white [infant mortality rate](#) was 4.6 per 1,000 live births compared to 14.0 for African American infants. To address these disparities, in 2007, the state legislature provided funding to MDDHMH to start the [Babies Born Healthy](#) infant mortality reduction initiative. This initiative focuses on preconception, pregnancy, and post-delivery health issues and emphasizes using data, leveraging partnerships, and a comprehensive systems approach.

In 2011, the [Infant Mortality Epidemiology Work Group](#) reviewed data and made recommendations on the best ways to reduce infant mortality. One [recommendation](#) was to ensure safe infant sleep by banning crib bumpers. MDDHMH collaborated with partners such as hospitals, academic experts, and health professionals to initiate a process to ban crib bumpers in Maryland. Crib bumpers are a cushioned lining that attach to the bottom portion of the sides of the crib. Originally, they were used to prevent infant's limbs and head getting stuck between the crib rails. However, modern-day crib railings are not as far apart from each other as they were in the past. More importantly, [evidence](#) has shown that infants can suffocate if they end up pressed against a crib bumper while they sleep, but these deaths are preventable.

The ban on crib bumpers is part of a larger campaign to promote safe sleep in Maryland as part of the Babies Born Healthy Initiative. The main message for the public is "babies sleep best alone, on their backs, and in a crib," which is known as the ABCs of safe sleep.

Steps Taken:

- In April 2011, MDDHMH requested initial public comment on the use of bumper pads in infant cribs. Maryland Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene **Joshua Sharfstein, MD** convened a panel of health professionals to review the comments submitted and other available evidence.
- Three out of four panel members recommended that the secretary impose a ban on the sale of bumper pads for use in infant cribs because the bumpers add no value but can be fatal.
- In October 2011, MDDHMH put forward a proposal for public comment consistent with the panel's recommendations in the Maryland Register.
- After review of all the comments, MDDHMH proposed regulations that would prohibit the sale of bumper pads for use in infant cribs beginning June 21, 2013.
- Media coverage was widespread. The [Baltimore Sun](#), [Huffington Post](#), [Yahoo News](#), [CNN](#), and local and national television covered stories about the crib bumper ban.

- The African American infant mortality rate fell from 12.0 in 2011 to 10.3 in 2012, a 14 percent decline and a historic low for Maryland.
- To help continue this trend, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene banned all crib bumpers in MD on June 2013 to prevent sleep-related infant deaths.

- The sale of crib bumpers is prohibited both in stores and online. Resale stores such as Goodwill or other thrift stores cannot sell crib bumpers. Maryland retailers were notified of this policy when the ban went into effect through professional groups.
- Public education efforts include the [B'More for Healthy Babies Safe Sleep video](#) that is shown in all hospitals in Baltimore before patient discharge, as well as in targeted locations, such as the state Motor Vehicle Administration sites and jury duty waiting rooms, where public health messages normally do not get promoted. Based on the success of this video, MDDHMH developed another [video](#) targeted to African American fathers to share throughout the state.
- Information on the crib bumper ban and the safe sleep campaign was provided to all local health departments, WIC clinics, and health-related professional organizations. Healthcare professionals can order safe sleep educational materials for their offices or clinics.
- Anyone can email dhmh.safesleep@maryland.gov with questions about safe sleep, to report a store that is noncompliant with the ban, or to register complaints. MDDHMH staff members check the email address daily.
- MDDHMH will issue a warning to any individual who ships or sells crib bumper pads to a purchaser in Maryland. If there continues to be violation of the regulation after a warning is issued, a fine of up to \$500 for each crib bumper shipped or sold can be assessed and implemented.

Results:

- The state ban on crib bumpers went into effect in 2013. Future evaluation data will show if the crib bumper ban has a positive impact on infant mortality rates
- The Maryland infant mortality rate has [decreased steadily since 2009](#) due to efforts from the Maryland government, MDDHMH, and healthcare providers. In 2012, Maryland saw a significant reduction in African American infant mortality rates. The African American infant mortality rate fell from 12.0 in 2011 to 10.3 in 2012, a 14 percent decline and a historic low for Maryland. MDDHMH believes that the crib bumper ban is likely to continue this downward trend.
- MDDHMH works closely with data teams to train them to be aware of birth outcomes and on how to use data to allocate limited resources.
- MDDHMH continues to promote the ABCs of safe sleep and created materials in Spanish to promote safe sleep messages.

Lessons Learned:

- The process to ban crib bumpers is more doable than states might think. Meet people where they are and educate them about the new research and reasons for the new safe sleep guidelines to ensure the message will resonate with the community. Education plus policy is the key.
- Grandparents and extended family, previous personal experiences, co-sleeping, and attachment parenting present challenges for the public to accept the new safe sleep message. It is important to educate all caregivers across generations about the ABCs of safe sleep.
- Combine messaging on the ABCs of safe sleep with a crib bumper ban to form a complete public health strategy.

- Internet sales of crib bumpers are illegal in Maryland, but they are hard to monitor. Develop a plan to monitor internet sales.
- Use the existing infant mortality data and make it real for the public by actively communicating about it. MDDHMH collected data on infant mortality, but they made it accessible for the public by creating the safe sleep campaign, banning crib bumpers, and developing the B'More for Healthy Babies Safe Sleep video.

For more information:

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