

## Introduction

This factsheet provides an overview of Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), the recommended safe sleep practices to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related infant deaths, and strategies for state and territorial health agencies to reduce rates of SIDS and other sleep-related infant deaths.

## Sudden Unexpected Infant Death/Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

About 4,000 infants die suddenly and unexpectedly each year.<sup>1</sup> SUID is the death of an infant younger than one year that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, and where the cause of death is not immediately obvious prior to investigation.<sup>1</sup> SUID includes deaths from SIDS, unknown causes, and accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed. SIDS is the sudden death of an infant that cannot be explained after a thorough scene investigation, review of medical history, and autopsy. It remains the leading cause of death of babies between one month and one year of age.<sup>1</sup> Although the exact causes of SIDS are not yet known—a common theory is the [triple-risk model](#) of vulnerable infant, critical development period, and outside stressors—it is clear that infant deaths related to SIDS have decreased precipitously since the [Back to Sleep](#) campaign was introduced in 1994 by a coalition led by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Unfortunately, SIDS rates have stabilized and there have been concomitant increases in other SUID causes, including a four-fold increase in accidental suffocation.<sup>2</sup>

## Safe Sleep Recommendations

Although the exact cause of SIDS is unknown, and many SUIDs remain with a diagnosis of “undetermined,” despite a thorough scene investigation and an autopsy, there are established steps that can be taken to reduce risk. [CDC](#) and [NIH](#) support the American Academy of Pediatrics’ [recommendations](#) aimed at reducing the risk of death from SIDS and other sleep-related infant deaths. Latest [reports](#) indicate that 70.5 percent of mothers reported that their infant was laid down to sleep on his or her back most of the time and that 39.4 percent of mothers never bed-share with their infant.<sup>3</sup> There is still much work left to be done to help all families adopt safe sleep practices.

Safe infant sleep recommendations<sup>4,5</sup>:

- Place the infant on its back to sleep every time.
- Use a firm sleep surface, such as a crib mattress covered by a fitted sheet.
- Room-share, but do not bed-share.
- Keep soft objects and loose bedding out of the crib (i.e. stuffed animals, pillows).
- Avoid overheating by dressing the infant appropriately for the environment.
- Get regular prenatal checkups.
- Avoid secondhand smoke exposure and do not smoke while pregnant.
- Breastfeed.

## What Can State Health Agencies do?

About 25,000 U.S. infants die each year from all causes.<sup>6</sup> SUID/SIDS remain among the top five causes of infant mortality in the United States. Several states are working to address infant mortality and SIDS by implementing programs to change behavior around safe infant sleep. Additionally, many states have laws and regulations related to specifically to SIDS.<sup>7</sup>

### *Laws and Regulations*

State laws related to SIDS vary in scope and subject. Many states have laws that provide guidance for coroners or medical examiners and set protocol for autopsies of SIDS cases.<sup>8</sup> The following states have laws requiring childcare workers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, or law enforcement officials to take special training on SIDS: Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Visit the National Conference on State Legislatures website for a full list and links to [state laws related to SIDS](#). In addition, Maryland banned the sale of crib bumpers through [regulations](#) issued by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in 2012.<sup>9</sup>

### *Cribs for Kids*

Crib distribution programs for low-income families are one common strategy to reduce infant sleep-related deaths. [Cribs for Kids](#) is a national nonprofit that partners with health departments, hospitals, health centers, childcare centers, and local nonprofits to provide free cribs for low-income families that might not otherwise be able to afford one. This program also provides education about safe infant sleep to caregivers. [New Mexico Department of Health](#) and [Nevada Department of Health and Human Services](#) are among state health departments participating in crib distribution programs.

### *Safe Sleep Campaigns*

To spread the word about safe infant sleep, the Tennessee Department of Health has developed a [Safe Sleep Campaign](#) using advertising materials such as bus wraps, door hangers, and posters with information for parents. The department also partnered with hospitals across the state in a [Safe Sleep Hospital Project](#) to spread the safe sleep message to parents and caregivers.

### *WIC Messaging*

In several states, including Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, mothers who receive benefits from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) also receive messages on safe sleep. For example, safe sleep messages are printed on WIC vouchers, some states are providing [board books](#) with safe sleep messages to WIC mothers, and local WIC offices have safe sleep demonstration displays in their offices.

## Public Health Recommendations

State and territorial health agencies have an important role in reducing the rates of SIDS and sleep-related infant death. Educating parents and providers to change their behaviors is key to community prevention of SIDS and sleep-related infant death. State and territorial health agencies can:

- ✓ Incorporate safe infant sleep education and behavior modification into home-visiting programs.

- ✓ Facilitate partnerships with other state agencies, hospitals, nonprofits, media, and other stakeholders to develop innovative programs and policies that promote safe infant sleep, reduce infant mortality, encourage smoking cessation, and promote breastfeeding, immunizations, and prenatal care.
- ✓ Advocate for legislation that requires training for childcare providers, first responders, and law enforcement officers in the prevention, recognition, treatment, or investigation protocols of SUID/SIDS.
- ✓ Incorporate grief support for parents and families who have lost an infant to SUID/SIDS into home-visiting programs.

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<sup>1</sup> CDC. "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)." Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/features/SidsAwarenessMonth/>. Accessed 1-10-2014.

<sup>2</sup> Shapiro-Mendoza C, Kimball M, Tomashek K, *et al.* "US infant mortality trends attributable to accidental suffocation and strangulation in bed from 1984 through 2004: are rates increasing?" *Pediatrics*. 2009. 123:533-539. Available at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/2/533>, Accessed 1-17-2014.

<sup>3</sup> HHS, HRSA, Maternal Child Health Bureau. "Safe Sleep Behaviors." *Child Health USA 2013*. Available at: <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/chusa13/perinatal-risk-factors-behaviors/p/safe-sleep-behaviors.html#return85>. Accessed 1-10-2014.

<sup>4</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. "SIDS and other sleep-related infant deaths: expansion of recommendations for a safe sleeping environment." Policy statement. *Pediatrics*. 2011. Available at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/10/12/peds.2011-2284.full.pdf+html>. Accessed 1-10-2014.

<sup>5</sup> NIH, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "Ways to reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death." Available at: <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sts/about/risk/Pages/reduce.aspx>. Accessed 1-10-2014.

<sup>6</sup> CDC. "Infant Mortality." Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/infantmortality.htm>. Accessed 1-10-2014.

<sup>7</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures. "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)." State laws. Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/sudden-infant-death-syndrome-laws.aspx>. Accessed 1-10-2014.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Walker A. "Regulation on Maryland's crib bumper ban finalized." Nov. 16, 2012. *Baltimore Sun*. Available at: [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-11-16/health/bs-hs-crib-bumpers-final-20121116\\_1\\_crib-bumpers-juvenile-products-manufacturers-association-ban](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-11-16/health/bs-hs-crib-bumpers-final-20121116_1_crib-bumpers-juvenile-products-manufacturers-association-ban). Accessed 1-10-2014.