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Ohio Safe Sleep Initiative

The Ohio Department of Health is leading statewide efforts to reduce infant mortality from sleep-related causes through policy change, a comprehensive marketing campaign, and support for health care providers.

Sleep-related deaths account for 16 percent of all infant (first born to 1 year old) deaths in Ohio.¹ However, 46 percent of deaths among Ohio infants 1 month to 1 year old are sleep related, and they occur at a rate of more than three deaths per week.² Infant sleep environments appear to play a role in unexpected infant death: 56 percent of sleep-related infant deaths occur in adult beds, on couches, or on chairs, while only 26 percent occur in cribs or bassinets.³ In fact, of the 836 sleep-related infant deaths in Ohio between 2009 and 2013, less than one percent occurred when the infant was placed in an environment following the key American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [recommendations for safe sleep environments](#): infants should be placed to sleep alone, on their backs, in a crib or bassinet, in smoke-free surroundings.⁴

- In Ohio more infants died in unsafe sleep environments than did children of all ages in vehicular crashes between 2009 and 2013.
- Sleep-related causes of infant mortality include sudden infant death syndrome, accidental suffocation, positional asphyxia, overlay, and undetermined causes.

Decreasing infant mortality is a priority in the Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) [2013-2014 Strategic Plan](#). In 2012 the ODH Child Injury Action Group (CIAG) began work on its goal to reduce unintentional infant sleep-related deaths by 10 percent from 38.0 per 100,000 by Sept. 30, 2016. Key partners in this mission are the CIAG Safe Sleep Committee, which includes sleep experts from agencies across Ohio, local health departments, birthing hospitals, children's hospitals, and parent advocates; the Ohio Collaborative to Prevent Infant Mortality; the Ohio Institute for Equity in Birth Outcomes; the SID Network of Ohio; the Ohio Chapter of AAP; the Ohio Children's Trust Fund; the Ohio Hospital Association; Cribs for Kids; and state legislators.⁵ These partners support the CIAG goal through strategies to consistently promote and implement the AAP guidelines in hospitals, child care centers, baby product retailers, state agencies, and among parents and caregivers.

All infants are at risk of sleep-related death, regardless of racial/ethnic group, parental income level, geographic location, and feeding method.⁶ However, the incidence of sleep-related deaths among black infants is more than twice their representation in the general population in the state.⁷ While all infants in Ohio will benefit from this initiative, ODH is specifically targeting areas with high rates of sleep-related infant deaths.

Steps Taken:

- [Ohio Am. Sub. S.B. 276 of the 130th General Assembly](#), passed in 2014, requiring safe sleep education be provided to new parents by a variety of professionals ([health department summary of bill](#)). Hospitals are required to screen new parents and caregivers to determine whether there will be a safe crib at home for the newborn before discharge from the birthing facility. If the screening reveals it is unlikely the newborn will have a safe crib at home, the facility must assist the family to obtain a safe crib at no charge. In response to the new law, ODH has developed model [screening tools](#) for hospitals as well as model policies for [licensed child care centers](#), [maternity units](#), [pediatric hospitals](#), and [parent/caregiver teaching points](#). ODH has worked with the Ohio Hospital Association

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to develop a questionnaire to be used by birthing facilities to screen before discharge for safe sleep environments at home. ODH submitted the first annual report to the governor regarding implementation progress and will be reporting annually regarding referrals made as a result of the screenings and the effectiveness of the safe sleep education program.

- ODH launched a statewide safe sleep marketing campaign to provide a clear, consistent message for parents and grandparents in high infant mortality areas of Ohio on the importance of putting babies to sleep using the “ABCs” of safe sleep: “**A**lone. **O**n **T**heir **B**ack. **I**n a **C**rib.” ODH developed the campaign messages using input about barriers to the ABCs from a series of 12 focus groups with Ohio parents. The focus group findings showed that barriers to parents using the ABCs of safe sleep include misperceptions and concerns about infant choking, warmth/comfort, and safety or bonding, as well as parents wanting more information about why the ABCs were important instead of simply being told what to do. The campaign launched in April 2014 in billboard, cable, transit, Internet, and radio ads in Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Southeast Ohio. In addition, ODH’s [safe sleep website](#) offers educational materials that show parents and caregivers how to provide a safe sleep environment and reduce the risk of sleep-related infant death. ODH recently completed an evaluation of the campaign.
- ODH is supporting the distribution of the Charlie’s Kids Foundation educational board book, *Sleep Baby, Safe and Snug*. ODH has purchased nearly 80,000 books in both English and Spanish and will distribute them to high-risk families through partnerships with WIC, Help Me Grow, Child and Family Health Service Projects, local health departments, and other infant safe sleep partners.
- ODH has partnered with [Cribs for Kids](#) sites in high-risk areas of Ohio to educate parents and provide “survival kits” that include a portable crib, fitted crib sheet, sleep sack, [Charlie’s Kids Foundation Board book](#), pacifier, and ODH educational materials.
- ODH coordinates the Ohio Child Fatality Review, whereby each county’s board of health reviews all local child fatalities, including sleep-related deaths, to identify possible prevention strategies. Local boards of health are actively involved in identifying high risk geographic areas and populations, crafting risk-reduction messages, and carrying out prevention strategies in their communities.
- To improve data collection and understanding of sleep related deaths, an amendment to Ohio Revised Code 313.121 now requires coroners and law enforcement to conduct death scene investigations for all sudden, unexpected deaths of infants using standard protocols and the sudden unexplained infant death investigation (SUIDI) form developed by the CDC. The completed SUIDI form is to be shared with the Child Fatality Review board. ODH has provided three trainings for coroners and law enforcement investigators, and plans to conduct at least two more in early 2016.
- ODH enacted an [Infant Safe Sleep Policy](#) in 2012 to ensure that all ODH programs and activities convey consistent safe sleep messages to patients and providers. The messages inform on specific safe sleep environments; the importance of breastfeeding; avoiding smoking, alcohol, and illicit drugs during pregnancy; delivering messages using culturally appropriate methods; and use of appropriate safe sleep images.
- Other partners are also conducting related sleep safe activities.
 - The Ohio AAP conducted a quality improvement initiative modeled after a CIAG-funded project with six children’s hospitals across the state to increase the number of safe sleep environments for infants in inpatient settings.⁸
 - The Ohio Hospital Association launched its “[Safe Sleep is Good4Baby](#)” program focused on (1) Modeling safe sleep practices in the hospital, (2) Educating parents and families about safe sleep practices at home, and (3) Advocating for and educating community members about the importance of safe sleep.

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Next Steps:

- ODH is clarifying how requirements in the legislation will be implemented.
- The current model for crib distribution is also being reviewed.
- While no data is yet available on the impact of the Safe Sleep campaign, ODH has secured a contractor to evaluate the impact of this and other efforts.

Results:

- The ODH Safe Sleep policy has resulted in a uniform safe sleep messaging standard and raised awareness of appropriate safe sleep messages across ODH programs. Agency staff now only use images that follow the ABC model when developing publications.
- The Safe Sleep marketing campaign has been essential in rallying Ohio's infant safe sleep professionals around a common goal. ODH achieved buy-in from all levels by using consistent messaging and providing needed state-level leadership to support infant safe sleep.
- As a result of the statewide emphasis on safe sleep, police departments are beginning to implement "Cops and Cribs" programs to train officers to be aware of infant sleep environments and offer Cribs for Kids referrals as needed. In addition, the Cribs for Kids initiative itself has resulted in a network of partner sites in the most at-risk areas of the state.
- ODH has solidified safe sleep partnerships with the Ohio Hospital Association, Ohio Chapter of the AAP, SID Network of Ohio, and Ohio Children's Trust fund.

Lessons Learned:

- **Focus groups are a great way to inform messaging campaigns.** ODH learned important lessons from the parent focus groups about the acceptability of sleep safe messages.
- **Include all possible stakeholders in planning and discussions.** This helps keep all interested partners involved and facilitates efforts moving quickly as opportunities arise. In addition, working with a broad stakeholder base underscores the fact that safe sleep messages apply to all babies, regardless of income, race/ethnicity, or geographic location. ODH has made an effort to engage as many stakeholders as possible on the ODH Safe Sleep policy development committee, including WIC staff and breastfeeding advocates.
- **State health agencies can play a key role in leading and coordinating local efforts.** In Ohio, ODH learned that numerous groups were already focusing on sleep safe issues in small, local projects. ODH's work to coordinate these efforts was critical to the success of the existing initiatives and lent credibility and synchronicity to the work.

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¹ Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Children's Trust Fund. "Ohio Child Fatality Review: Fifteenth Annual Report." Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/cfhs/cfr/cfrrept.aspx> . Accessed 11-16-2015.

² Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Children's Trust Fund. "Ohio Child Fatality Review: Fifteenth Annual Report." Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/cfhs/cfr/cfrrept.aspx> . Accessed 11-16-2015.

³ Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Children's Trust Fund. "Ohio Child Fatality Review: Fifteenth Annual Report." Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/cfhs/cfr/cfrrept.aspx> . Accessed 11-16-2015.

⁴ Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Children's Trust Fund. "Ohio Child Fatality Review: Fifteenth Annual Report." Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/cfhs/cfr/cfrrept.aspx> . Accessed 11-16-2015.

⁵ Ohio Department of Health. "Ohio's Commitment to Prevent Infant Mortality." Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/~media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/cfhs/Infant%20Mortality/collaborative/OhioCommitment2013-h.ashx> . Accessed 5-23-14.

⁶ Ohio Department of Health. "Infant Safe Sleep Policy Fact Sheet." Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/~media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/cfhs/child%20and%20family%20health%20services/Infant%20Safe%20Sleep%20Policy%20Fact%20Sheet.ashx> . Accessed 11-16-2015.

⁷ Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Children's Trust Fund. "Ohio Child Fatality Review: Fifteenth Annual Report." Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/cfhs/cfr/cfrrept.aspx> . Accessed 11-16-2015.

⁸ Gittleman M, Denny S, Southworth H, *et al.* "Ohio AAP's Comprehensive Approach to Addressing Ohio's Infant Safe Sleep." Presented March 11, 2014. Available at <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/~media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/cfhs/Infant%20Mortality/collaborative/presentations/3-11-14/Gittleman-Denny%20AAP%20safe%20sleep.ashx> . Accessed 11-16-2015.