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SIDS

What you should know about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

You & Your Child

A guide for new parents

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden and unexplained death of an infant under 1 year of age. It is blamed for the death of nearly 5,000 babies a year in the United States.

The cause of SIDS is still not known.

SIDS usually occurs when babies are between 1 and 4 months of age. It affects boys more than girls. And most deaths occur during the colder months of the year – fall, winter, and early spring.

Experts believe that SIDS occurs more often during colder months because that is when infants have a greater risk of infection and because infants are often "overbundled" and "overheated" during this time.

Because SIDS occurs more often in the early morning when most babies are asleep, experts also believe that sleep may be part of the problem.

This mysterious threat to your baby can be frightening. But understand that SIDS deaths are still fairly rare.

ON BACK
THE RISKS OF SIDS AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOUR BABY SAFER.

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Facts About SIDS

Young children are very vulnerable to the dangers of tobacco smoke

What causes SIDS? Researchers do not know for sure. But studies suggest some conditions that may lead to SIDS deaths. These include:

- Blocked breathing. In some cases, babies who died of SIDS were found to have had their "external airways" (nose and mouth) covered when they were asleep, blocking their breathing.
- Nervous system problems. Some children who have been resuscitated from a SIDS episode had abnormal sleep patterns, which be may due to central nervous system immaturity.
- Brain abnormalities. Some research suggests that SIDS may be due to brain abnormalities in the portion of the brain that controls breathing and waking.
- Baby's environment. Not enough oxygen, too much carbon dioxide, and infections may contribute to SIDS.

Certain things put babies at a greater risk for SIDS

Some babies are at greater risk for SIDS than others.

- Babies who sleep on their stomachs are at a greater risk.
- Mothers who smoke during pregnancy are three times more likely to have a SIDS baby.
- Babies exposed to second-hand smoke are twice as likely to have SIDS.
- Mothers who are less than 20-years-old at the time of their first pregnancy and mothers who had late or no prenatal care are more likely to have SIDS babies.
- Babies who are born premature or at a low birth weight are at higher risk.

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SIDS Safety Tips

Put your baby to sleep on his or her back
Having your baby sleep on his or her back eliminates one of the risks of SIDS.

Sometimes, having your baby sleep on his or her back may not be a good idea. If your baby has a health condition, such as a birth defect, often spits up after eating, or has breathing, lung or heart problems, check with your doctor. It may be better for your baby to sleep in a different position.

The next-best sleeping position is on the side with the baby's arm forward to prevent the baby from rolling on his or her stomach.

Have your baby sleep on a firm surface
You should try to avoid having your baby's face sink into a mattress or other soft material, which could obstruct breathing. Do not put fluffy comforters, blankets, or pillows under your baby. And don't put your baby to sleep on a waterbed.

Soft toys can be dangerous
Don't place soft stuffed animals or other soft toys in the crib with your baby. Soft toys can smother a baby

Don't "overheat" your baby
Babies should be kept warm, but not too warm. Avoid bundling up your baby to the point where he or she can become overheated.

A special detection system can monitor a baby while sleeping
A new detection system is available that monitors an infant's breathing, heart beat, and any other movement.

If the infant's body stops moving or the baby stops breathing, the alarm will give the infant a mild push to wake him or her. If the infant does not respond to this push, an audiovisual alarm is activated.

Ask your doctor about such a monitor.

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