



Information Statement

SLEEPING WITH A BABY

SHARING SLEEP SURFACES WITH A BABY INCREASES THE RISK OF SIDS AND FATAL SLEEP ACCIDENTS IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES

Sharing a sleep surface with a baby increases the risk of SIDS and fatal sleep accidents in some circumstances. SIDS and Kids recommends sleeping a baby in a cot next to the parents' bed for the first six to twelve months of life as this has been shown to lower the risk of SIDS.¹⁻³

There appears to be no increased risk of SIDS whilst sharing a sleep surface with a baby during feeding, cuddling and playing providing that the baby is returned to a cot or a safe sleeping surface before the parent goes to sleep.⁴⁻⁶

To Reduce the Risks of SIDS and Fatal Sleep Accidents

1. Sleep baby on the back from birth, not on the tummy or side
2. Sleep baby with face uncovered (no doonas, pillows, lambs wool, bumpers or soft toys)
3. Avoid exposing infants to tobacco smoke before birth and after
4. Provide a safe sleeping environment (safe cot, safe mattress, safe bedding)
5. Sleep baby in its own safe sleeping environment next to the parent's bed for the first six to twelve months of life

There is much debate in the literature about the practice and definition of bed sharing. For the purpose of this statement the term sharing the same sleep surface is used which includes bed sharing and cosleeping practices. Sharing a sleep surface with a baby is a complex issue that encompasses many factors, and there is currently insufficient evidence to issue a blanket statement either for or against this practice.⁶

Several studies have demonstrated that babies who sleep in close proximity to their mothers have better outcomes relating to successful initiation and duration of breastfeeding.⁷⁻⁹ A randomised study of infant sleeping location demonstrated that side-car cribs that attach to the mother's bed are effective in enhancing breastfeeding initiation and preserving infant safety in the postnatal ward.⁹

Studies have identified circumstances where sharing a sleep surface with a baby increases the risk of SIDS and fatal sleeping accidents.

Increased risk of SIDS

Babies who are most at risk of SIDS or sleeping accidents whilst sharing a sleep surface, are babies who are less than four months of age⁴, and infants who are born pre-term or small for gestational age.^{4-6,10} Most studies show that SIDS deaths attributable to sharing a sleep surface are predominantly amongst babies whose parents smoke.^{3-6,10-12}

Most studies have shown no increased risk from infants bed sharing with non-smoking mothers^{4,13,14} though the large multi-centre European study showed a small risk¹¹ and a Scottish study showed a larger risk¹⁵, particularly for younger infants, though no account was taken of parental alcohol intake or sedating drugs^{6,11,15,16}.

There is a very high risk of infant death and sleeping accidents when a baby shares a sofa or couch with an adult during sleep.^{6,10,16,17}

Increased Risk of Fatal Sleep Accidents

Adult sleeping environments may contain hazards that can be fatal for babies. These risks include overlaying of the baby by another individual who may be under the influence of alcohol or sedating drugs; entrapment or wedging between the mattress and another object such as a wall; head entrapment in bed railings, and suffocation from pillows and blankets.¹⁸⁻²⁰

When is sharing a sleep surface not safe?

Sharing a sleep surface with a baby must be avoided in the following circumstances:

- Where the baby shares the sleep surface with a smoker^{3-6,10-12}
- Where there is adult bedding, doonas or pillows that may cover the infant^{10,19}
- Where the baby can be trapped between the wall and bed, can fall out of bed, or could be rolled on
- Where the parent is under the influence of alcohol or drugs that cause sedation or is overly tired¹⁹
- Where babies are sharing beds with other children or pets^{2,10}
- Where the baby is placed to sleep on a sofa, beanbag, waterbed or sagging mattress^{19,20}

Babies must never be left alone on an adult bed or put to sleep on a sofa^{4,13,17,21}

Important considerations when choosing to share a sleep surface with a baby

When choosing to bed share with an infant it is important to consider the sleeping environment. Babies are at the greatest risk if they sleep on their tummies or sides and if their faces become covered. Taking measures to prevent these situations will reduce the risk of infant death and fatal sleeping accidents.

- Put baby on the back to sleep (not on the tummy or side).
- Make sure the mattress is firm.
- Make sure that bedding cannot cover the infants face. Use only lightweight blankets, keep pillows, doonas and any other soft items well away from the baby and make sure there is nothing soft underneath the infant e.g. lambs wool.
- Place the baby at the side of one parent - not in between two parents, as this would increase the likelihood of the baby becoming covered or slipping underneath adult bedding.
- Ensure that the baby is not close to the edge of the bed where he/she can fall off. Do not place pillows at the side of the baby to prevent rolling off. A safer alternative is to place the adult mattress on the floor.
- Pushing the bed up against the wall can be hazardous. Babies have died after becoming trapped between the bed and the wall.
- As an alternative to bedding, an infant sleeping bag may be used so that the baby does not share the adult bedding. A safe infant sleeping bag is one with fitted neck and armholes. See the SIDS and Kids Frequently Asked Questions for further information about suitable infant sleeping bags.
- Side car cribs that attach to the mother's bed provide close proximity to enhance breastfeeding while providing a separate sleeping surface for the baby.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is evidence that sharing a sleep surface with a baby increases the risk of sudden infant death and fatal sleeping accidents in some circumstances. There is presently insufficient evidence to issue a blanket statement either for or against this infant care practice. SIDS and Kids recommends sleeping a baby in a cot next to the parents' bed for the first six to twelve months of life as this has been shown to lower the risk of SIDS and sleeping accidents.

The SIDS and Kids Safe Sleeping program is based on scientific evidence and was developed by Australian SIDS researchers, paediatricians, pathologists, and child health experts with input from overseas experts in the field. The 87% drop in SIDS deaths and the 5,000 lives that have been saved is testament to the effectiveness of the program.

The recommendations made in this SIDS and Kids Information Statement relating to sharing a

sleep surface with a baby are consistent with Safe Sleeping Policy Directives now in place in NSW and Queensland.^{22,23}

For further information visit the SIDS and Kids website at www.sidsandkids.org or phone us on 1300 308 307.

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