Unsafe Sleep:
Uncovering a Leading Cause of Infant Death

Unsafe sleep is the leading cause of non-natural infant death in Virginia. **Approximately 3,500 sleep-related deaths occur among U.S. babies each year**, including sudden unexpected infant death (SUID), sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), accidental suffocation, and deaths from unknown causes.

Sleep is one of the most important factors of an infant's well-being. Sadly, healthy babies are dying every day in Virginia because they are being placed to sleep in unsafe places or through unsafe practices by well-meaning, often uninformed, caregivers.

The Dangers of Unsafe Sleep

In a 2018 report, the Virginia State Child Fatality Review Team determined **87% of non-natural infant deaths between 2014 and 2016 were sleep-related in nature**. The top four risk factors that often appear concurrently, as determined by the report, were:

- soft bedding, such as blankets, pillows and stuffed animals (93%)
- sleeping on an inappropriate sleep surface, such as a couch (85%);
- co-sleeping/bed-sharing (52%)
- second-hand smoke (50%)

It is imperative that all parents and caregivers recognize and avoid sleep practices that place infants at risk. Yet, most often, images of crib décor or sleeping babies shown to parents are actually depictions of hazardous sleeping environments. In a recent study, the Pediatric Academic Society found that 84% of stock imagery and 71% of magazine photos showed hazardous sleeping environments according to American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines.

The AAP has a comprehensive list of the latest safe sleep recommendations to protect against sleep-related infant deaths, but many can be accomplished through just a few, simple practices.

Safe Sleep for Infants: Simple Practices Save Lives

1. **Lay your baby on their back for every sleep** (don't worry if, as your child gets older, they can turn themselves over from this original position)
2. **Use a firm, child-appropriate sleep surface** (couches and adult beds do not meet these safety standards)
3. **Room share without bed-sharing** (try bringing a crib into your room, instead)
4. **No soft objects** (toys, pillows or blankets) **or loose bedding in the crib**
5. **Place your baby to sleep in environment-appropriate clothing** that is no greater than one layer more than you would wear

There are other easy practices that can contribute added protection against sleep-related infant death, such as maintaining a smoke- and substance-free sleep environment for your child.

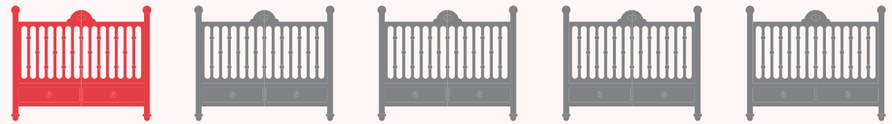
Every Sleep with Every Caregiver

Every person that comes in contact with your sleeping baby should know and follow safe sleep practices.

The practices your parents once knew have been updated and the recommendations have changed as research has advanced. Ensuring a truly safe sleep environment for your baby means having candid discussions about the safe sleep rules that must be followed by grandparents, child care providers, the baby's siblings and anyone else who may care for your child.

In the first year of life, your baby will sleep an average of 5,110 hours. **Treat those hours as 5,110 opportunities to employ life-saving practices with every person who may be present during your baby's sleep time.**

With the busy lives people live today, it truly takes a village to raise a child. It is up to each parent to advocate that their safe sleep practices are carried out by every person in their "village."



Nearly 1 in 5 SUID/SIDS deaths occur while an infant is in the care of someone other than a parent or usual caregiver.

Please Help Educate Your Community

Research continues to point to prevention practices to reduce risk and create the safest possible sleep environment for babies everywhere.

Visit SafeSleep365.com to learn more about AAP sleep recommendations and take the Safe Sleep Pledge. **Encourage all those in your circle to do the same.**

We each have an important role to play in keeping Virginia's children safe. Let's work together to bring greater awareness to safe sleep practices, and ensure infants have a safe and healthy start in life.

Safe Sleep 365

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