

## **Back to sleep is safest for your baby**

By Kristen Bonner

Each year in the United States, about 3,500 babies die while sleeping. This number of sleep-related deaths has dramatically decreased since the Back to Sleep campaign started in the 1990s, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We still have work to do. All parents and infant caregivers need up-to-date information.

Putting babies to sleep on their backs on a firm, flat surface are key steps to safe sleep. Yet according to recent surveys, 22% of mothers report not placing their baby on his or her back to sleep and 39% report using soft bedding.

It's important to know that parental smoking has been shown to increase the risk of infant deaths. However, breastfeeding is proven to reduce the risk of sleep-related deaths.

Babies need to have their own sleep space whether that be a bassinet, crib or playpen. Keep your baby's crib or bassinet in the same room where you sleep until your baby is at least six months old – ideally, until your baby is one year old.

Bed sharing with your baby may seem like a comforting arrangement for the infant. But the medical evidence shows that infants are at much higher risk of death when they are not sleeping in their own, safe cribs.

We all want the best for our babies, but sometimes what seems to be a good idea for sleep is proven to be risky when the evidence is reviewed. Here are some well researched guidelines to help you keep your baby safe.

- Place your baby on his or her back for all naps and at night.
- Supervise all tummy time.
- Use a firm, flat sleep surface for the baby, such as a mattress covered by a fitted sheet.
- Do not cover your baby's head or allow your baby to get too hot. Signs your baby may be getting too hot include sweating or his chest feels hot. Generally, it is good to dress your baby in one more layer of clothing than you have on in same room.
- Keep soft bedding such as blankets, pillows, bumper pads, and soft toys out of your baby's sleep area.
- If you feel your baby needs a blanket, a wearable blanket or sleep sack is best.
- Pacifiers are OK.
- If your baby falls asleep in a swing, car seat or another device, move him to a crib or bassinet as soon as possible because that is safest.
- Once the baby can flip herself over, keep putting her to bed on her back. If she flips herself over, it is OK to leave her.

These are all simple ways to protect the babies you love whether you are a parent, grandparent or someone else who cares for these little ones.

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