



Pennsylvania Child Death Review Team

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Dear Colleagues,

We are writing this letter to enlist your help to prevent infants from dying unnecessarily. We need your assistance to promote infant safe sleep practices to your patients.

Placing infants on their backs decreases the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). In 1994, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) initiated their "Back to Sleep" campaign. Since that time there has been a > 50% decrease in the number of deaths which otherwise would have been identified as SIDS.

It is now apparent that another very preventable risk factor is contributing to infants dying unnecessarily: an infant sleeping in the same bed or on the couch with an adult or other children. When babies are in the same bed as an adult or other children, they are at increased risk for being suffocated/smothered by the adult or by the loose bedding, or by entrapment in the bed/couch. This places them at an increased risk of dying from SIDS.

Both nationally and in Pennsylvania, Child Death Review Teams see repeated examples of infant deaths due to an unsafe sleeping environment. The scientific literature has shown that it is UNSAFE for an infant to sleep with another sibling or parent in an adult bed or on the couch.

We need you to give a clear and consistent safe sleep message every chance you get – in the newborn nursery and in follow up office visits, especially in the first 6 months of life. Please encourage parents to make sure that the message gets passed on to day care centers, grandparents, and anyone else who might care for their infant. For those providing prenatal care to women, we urge you to ask them if there is a safe sleeping environment for their infant before delivery.

A safe sleep environment for an infant under one year includes:

- **a separate sleep environment -- not in the same bed as an adult**
- **a crib or bassinet with a firm mattress**
- placement on their backs (not side or stomachs)
- no loose bedding or soft objects, and
- consideration of using a pacifier when putting to sleep

It is important to emphasize that an infant should never be in bed with another adult. Even though the AAP made this recommendation in November 2005, month after month we are seeing babies dying of this preventable cause. A full version of the November 2005 AAP policy statement can be found at the web site: <http://aappolicy.aapublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;116/5/1245.pdf>

Safe sleep anticipatory guidance does not interfere with breastfeeding. We encourage breastfeeding as the best source of nutrition for infants, but even breastfeeding mothers should not sleep in bed with their infants. If a breastfeeding mother is tired when nursing, she should breastfeed out of her bed. Note that studies have shown that an infant sleeping in the same room (but not in the same bed) is ideal for decreasing the risk of SIDS.

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Many times adults sleep with their infants because they cannot afford a crib for their child. Due to the tremendous success of the Cribs for Kids program, this should be less of an issue. If you live in an area with a local Cribs for Kids chapter (which is most of Pennsylvania), simply refer patients who cannot afford a crib to the local chapter (or call 1-888-721-CRIB) and they can receive a free Pack N Play. If your area does not have a local chapter, please consider starting one. For more information on the Cribs for Kids program, please contact Judy Bannon, from SIDS of PA, at 1-888-721-CRIB. (www.cribsforkids.org)

Pennsylvania, like most states, has an active Child Death Review process which began in 1991. Currently, there are local teams in 62 of the 67 Pennsylvania counties. Each multidisciplinary team has as its goal to reduce the number of preventable child deaths. If you would like more information about Child Death Review in Pennsylvania, or would like to become involved in your county, please email: cdr@paaap.org.

For resources on safe sleep materials for your patients, please visit:

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/> and <http://www.healthychildcare.org/pdf/SIDSparentsafesleep.pdf>

Please be aware that a bill has been introduced in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives (HB 1752) that will improve SIDS education in Pennsylvania including specific information for new parents on safe sleeping environments for infants.

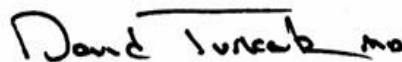
Safe sleep is an urgent public health matter. Often, parents state they did not know that sleeping with their infant was dangerous. **It is our job, as providers of health care for infants, to make this message a priority!** We are writing this letter to you (all primary care providers of pregnant women and infants), because you can make a difference in the number of infants that die from this preventable cause in Pennsylvania. Please discuss this matter with your colleagues to ensure everyone is giving the same and consistent message.

Thank you for your help. If you have any comments or questions, please do not hesitate to email us at: cdr@paaap.org

Sincerely,



Erich Batra, MD, FAAP
Medical Director, PA Child Death Review



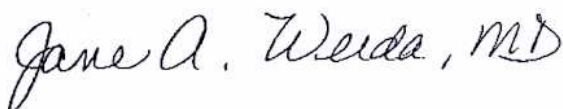
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