

Sudden Infant Death - A brief guide for Professionals

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden and unexpected death of a baby where no cause is found. For many babies it is likely that a combination of factors affect them at a vulnerable stage of their development, which leads them to die suddenly and unexpectedly. However, while SIDS cannot be completely prevented, we do know you can significantly reduce the chance of SIDS occurring by following safer sleep advice.

You may find you have contact with families; either within their own or another person's home, within a community setting; such as GP surgery, children's centres, education settings, shopping areas, at baby group etc. Having an awareness of safer sleep guidance will enable you to recognise when a parent or key carer would benefit from safer sleep advice or further support.

Safer sleep: key points discussed with parents and carers

- Sleep baby on their back for all sleeps – day and night – as this can reduce the risk of SIDS by six times compared to sleeping them on their front. Babies should sleep on a firm, flat mattress covered in a waterproof material and free of pillows, cot bumpers and toys. Babies should sleep with their feet at the foot of the cot/crib.



- A room temperature of 16-20°C – with light bedding or a lightweight, well-fitting baby sleep bag– is comfortable and safe for sleeping babies.
- Parents/Carers should share a room with their baby for the first six months – this can halve the risk of SIDS.
- Keep baby smoke-free during pregnancy and after birth – this is one of the most protective things that can be done for baby. Around 60% of sudden infant deaths could be avoided if no baby was exposed to smoke during pregnancy or around the home.



- Signpost Parents/Carers to help and advice via the NHS SmokeFree Helpline on 0800 0224 332 or www.nhs.uk/smokefree or they can download the free NHS Smokefree app which allows them to: track progress, see how much they're saving & get daily support. After 28 days smoke-free, they're 5 times more likely to quit for good!
- Parents/Carers are reminded to never sleep on a sofa or armchair with their baby as this can increase the risk of SIDS by 50 times.
- Parents/Carers should not share a bed or co-sleep with your baby if you or your partner has been drinking, is a smoker, has been taking drugs (including prescribed medications which may make you drowsy) or is extremely tired; these factors can put babies at an extremely high risk of SIDS when co-sleeping. One study found that the risk of SIDS when co-sleeping is six times higher in smokers than in non-smokers.



- Car seats should only be used for transport and not as an alternative for cots or high chairs. Babies should be taken out as soon as they have got to their destination, and placed onto a firm, flat surface to sleep.

The above guidance is especially important for babies who were born premature (before 37 weeks) or of low birth weight (2.5kg/ 5.5lb), as these babies are at a higher risk of SIDS. If you observe a situation where safer sleep is not being practised, do speak up; providing a consistent message will help reduce the risk of SIDS for all babies. Parents and carers can access individual tailored advice and support about safer sleep by contacting their local Gloucestershire Health visiting team:

Further safer sleep advice, videos, and resources are available from: The Lullaby Trust: www.lullabytrust.org.uk/safer-sleep-advice/

This guide does not replace safeguarding guidance, any concerns regarding the welfare of a baby, child or young person should be escalated through local safeguarding procedures; including concerns raised with regard to non-engagement with safer sleep advice. <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gscp>