

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

Frequently Asked Questions that you may be asked as a professional

What is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)?

SIDS is the sudden and unexpected death of a baby where no cause is found.

What causes SIDS?

We do not know what causes SIDS. 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. Please be aware that babies that are born prematurely or of a low birth weight are at a higher risk of SIDS.

Do babies who die of SIDS have any symptoms?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any babies who have died from SIDS had any previous symptoms.

Is SIDS common?

SIDS is rare but 4 babies die each week in the UK. There are things you can do to reduce your risk.

How can we reduce the risk of SIDS?

SIDS cannot be completely prevented, but you can reduce the risks of SIDS considerably by following the guidance in the Parent's Red Book.

- [Sleep your 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.
- [Share a room with your baby](#) for the first six months – this can halve the risk of SIDS.
- [Keep your baby smoke-free](#) during pregnancy and after birth – this is one of the most protective things you can do for your baby. Around 60% of sudden infant deaths could be avoided if no baby was exposed to smoke during pregnancy or around the home. If someone who smokes wants to cuddle your baby we recommend they wash their hands and preferably change/cover their clothes. For further information about smoking cessation contact www.nhs.uk/smokefree 0800 022 4332
- [Never sleep on a sofa or armchair](#) with your baby. The risk of SIDS is 50% times higher than if your baby was put to sleep in their own cot.
- Do not share a bed or [co-sleep](#) with your baby if they were premature or were of low birth weight or 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.

Is a baby sleeping on their back more likely to choke on their own vomit?

No. Research has found that babies are safer sleeping on their backs.

My mum says I was put to sleep on my front and that was the advice then, why has it changed?

Research has shown that the chance of SIDS is much higher when a baby is placed on their front to sleep (1991 Back to Sleep Campaign)

How do I check if my baby is too hot or cold?

Feel your baby's chest or the back of their neck (your baby's hands and feet will usually be cooler, which is normal). If your baby's skin is hot or sweaty, remove one or more layers of bed clothes or bedding. Baby's do not need to wear hats indoors nor sleep under a duvet or quilt.

Is sleeping a baby on their front better for babies with reflux?

All babies should be put down to sleep on their backs. If concerned discuss this further with a Health professional.

Will a sleep positioner help keep my baby on their back to sleep and therefore lower the risk of SIDS?

It is much safer for your baby to be in their cot with just the sheets or blankets, unless advised to do so by a medical professional.

I am worried I might fall asleep with my baby, is this ok?

It is always safer to put your baby down in a safe place to sleep but for further advice please speak to your Midwife or Health Visitor.

Is it okay for my baby to sleep in a car seat?

Ensure your baby doesn't get too hot when in the car. Check on your baby regularly when they are asleep. On long car journeys, stop for breaks so your baby is not in the car seat for prolonged periods (some manufacturers recommend a maximum period of 2 hours in car seats).

For further advice:

- **Speak to your Health Visitor or Midwife**
- **Lullaby Trust support@lullabytrust.org.uk.**

Gloucestershire Child Death Review