



# Genesee County Health Department

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Date: August 31, 2010  
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Contact Person: Michelle Maitland  
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RE: Infant Sleep Related Deaths

September is infant safe sleep month for Michigan. Since 2000, 108 healthy infants in Genesee County died due to confirmed or probable suffocation either by soft bedding, sleeping face down, or overlay by another person. In each of these cases the Medical Examiner's office performed a thorough investigation (autopsy, toxicology, and death scene investigation) including a death scene re-enactment to determine the cause of death. None of these otherwise healthy infants who died unexpectedly while sleeping were in the recommended safe sleep position. The deaths occurred in all areas of the county including Flint, Flushing, Grand Blanc, Davison, Burton, and Swartz Creek.

When the "Back to Sleep" campaign was first implemented in the early 1990s the incidence of sudden infant death decreased by over 50%. Despite these gains, some infants are still placed in unsafe sleep environments. The risk of a sudden unexpected infant death can be reduced by following safe sleep practices as recommended by the

American Academy of Pediatrics for every sleep time including naps.

- Back to sleep: Infants should be placed on their back to sleep. Stomach and side sleeping are never recommended for healthy infants.
- Use a separate sleep surface: Studies of bed-sharing have shown it to be dangerous especially if there is more than one person in the bed, the person is overly tired, or has used alcohol or other drugs. It is especially dangerous to sleep with an infant on a couch. Sleeping in a crib in the parent's room has been shown to reduce the risk of sudden infant death.
- Use a firm sleep surface: A firm, tight fitting crib mattress, covered by a properly fitted sheet is the recommended sleeping surface.
- Keep soft objects and loose bedding out of the crib: Soft objects such as pillows, quilts, comforters, sheepskins, stuffed toys, bumper pads, and other soft objects should be kept out of an infant's sleeping environment. Instead of blankets, use pajamas or sleep sacks that will keep the baby warm without the risk of covering the head.
- Avoid overheating: Over-bundling should be avoided and the room temperature should be kept comfortable for a lightly clothed adult.
- Do not smoke during pregnancy or expose the infant to second hand smoke: This has been a major risk factor in almost every study of sudden infant death.
- Consider using a pacifier at nap time and bedtime: Although the reason is not completely understood, pacifier use has been shown to reduce the risk of sudden infant death. If you are breastfeeding, discuss the use of a pacifier with your pediatric provider.

- Avoid products that promise to reduce sudden infant death: Products like sleep positioners or other specially designed items for the crib are not recommended. None have been tested enough to see if they work or are safe.

Make sure anyone who watches your baby knows and follows these important strategies for reducing the risk of sudden infant death. About one in five sudden infant deaths happens when someone other than the parent is caring for the infant.

Reducing the risk of sudden infant death is not difficult or expensive. For more information or for resources in the community call the Maternal-Infant Health and Mortality programs at the Genesee County Health Department at 257-3134 or go to [www.gchd.us](http://www.gchd.us).

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