



What is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is when a young child dies suddenly between the age of two weeks and 12 months. It is the most common cause of death for babies. Only an autopsy can find out if SIDS was the reason for the death. "At least one family and sometimes as many as five families in Nunavut go through this tragic experience every year."¹

Parents who have lost a child due to SIDS should not blame themselves. Until the cause(s) of SIDS are found, research can only show us how to reduce the risks. SIDS deaths occur in families from all income levels, ethnic backgrounds and geographic locations. Research into SIDS is looking at the reasons why healthy babies die suddenly and unexpectedly. We do know that some things may increase the risks of SIDS:

- Smoking can affect the development of the unborn child and double the risk of SIDS.
- Putting the baby on its side to sleep.
- Overheating and dressing the baby in too many layers.
- Lack of prenatal care during pregnancy and lack of postnatal care after the birth.

Reducing the Risk of SIDS

While the exact causes of SIDS are unknown, following these suggestions might prevent many cases of SIDS.

Sleeping Position

Normal healthy babies should be placed on their back and on a firm surface with no toys, bumper pads or pillow. Babies do not choke or have any other problems when they sleep on their back. There are certain health conditions that do

require a baby to sleep on its tummy. Parents should talk about their baby's needs with a nurse or doctor. Older infants may be able to turn on their own from their back onto their tummy. It is not necessary to



force babies to sleep on their backs if they have the ability to roll over themselves.

Smoke-free Surroundings

Babies who are around any form of smoke are more likely to get sick. A smoke-free home is necessary - not only for the baby's overall health but also to help reduce the risk of SIDS.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is also linked with women who smoke during pregnancy. A recent

¹ Osborne, Geraldine. "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome". May, 2005. Public Health Physician, Department of Health and Social Services, Government of Nunavut.

“I have known of babies dying while they were asleep. Some babies just died in their sleep without being suffocated.”² (Aalasi [Alice] Joamie)

study by the National Centre for Health Statistics shows women who quit smoking but then start smoking again after delivery put their babies at risk for SIDS. Babies who were exposed to smoke only after birth were twice as likely to die from SIDS as those whose mothers did not smoke at all. Babies continuously exposed to smoke both during and after pregnancy are three times more at risk for SIDS.

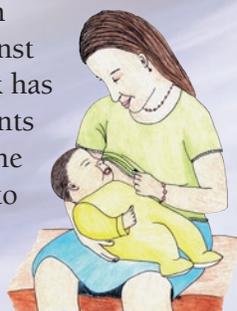
Dressing the Baby for Sleep

Studies from other countries state that babies who become too hot have an increased risk of SIDS. Take care when applying these study results to Canada, because our climate and child-care practices differ.

Parents should know that infants need warmth and protection from our cold winters, but they should not overheat during other seasons. If a room is comfortable for adults, it is most likely fine for their infant too. Dress and cover babies to prevent overheating, even during an illness.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding can help protect against SIDS. Breast milk has important nutrients that help boost the immune system to reduce illnesses and infections. Breastfeeding



creates a bond between a mother and her baby. All women should be encouraged and supported to breastfeed their babies.

Research into SIDS tells us that it is not caused by:

- How the baby is fed.
- Immunizations.
- Child abuse or neglect.
- Vomiting or choking.
- Catching it from others.

Another important point is that SIDS does not cause pain or suffering to the infant.

² Ootoova, Iisapi et al. “Perspectives on Traditional Health,” Interviewing Inuit Elders Series. Edited by Michele Therrien and Frederic Laugrand. Nunavut Arctic College, 2001, Vol. 5, p. 179. <http://nac.nu.ca/OnlineBookSite/vol5/index.html>

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

If you or someone you know has experienced SIDS there are many resources that can help you and your family understand what has happened and where to turn for help. You may be able to find these at a health centre or library in your community. Some titles include: *SIDS & Infant Death Survival Guide*; *What Family & Friends Can Do*; and *Empty Cradle, Broken Hearts - Surviving the Death of Your Baby*.



ᐱᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ

ajunginiq centre

Telephone: 1-877-602-4445

E-mail: inuit@naho.ca

Web site: www.naho.ca/inuit/e/resources/

OTHER RESOURCES:

If you have access to the Internet, you can find information at:

Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Death: www.sidscanada.org/ and www.sidscanada.org/aboriginal.html

Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/prenatal/sids_e.html

National Indian and Inuit Community Health Representatives Organization: www.niichro.com/2004/pdf/INtouch/in-touch-vol-24.pdf