

Bedsharing and bassinets: 2 new studies assess the risks

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Bassinet use in 2006 was nearly double what it was in 1992, and even though more than 45% of infants between the ages of 0-2 months use them, little is known about bassinet safety. In fact, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has guidelines regarding bassinet construction, but there are no government safety standards for bassinets. In 2005, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) revised its recommendations for a safe infant sleep environment, suggesting a separate but nearby sleeping arrangement (i.e. roomsharing without bedsharing). Two studies soon to be published in *The Journal of Pediatrics* evaluate the frequency of bedsharing and the potential risk factors of bassinet use.

Drs. Jodi Pike and Rachel Moon of Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., used CPSC records from 1990 to 2004 to review the death reports of 53 infants who died suddenly and unexpectedly in bassinets. In 85% of the cases, the researchers found that lack of oxygen was the cause of death. More than half of the infants were found on their stomachs, and other items such as blankets, pillows, and plastic bags were found in 74% of the bassinets. Nine infants died in bassinets that were not functioning correctly, either from misuse or mechanical problems.

In a related study, Dr. Moon and colleagues from Children's National Medical Center, George Washington University, Yale University, and Boston University, reviewed the sleep locations of 708 mothers and their infants. Using the data collected from several Women, Infant, and Children centers (WIC) in 2005, the researchers found that roughly 33% of the mothers and infants were sharing a sleep space. According to the authors, "Approximately half of all sudden and unexpected infant deaths in the United States occur when an infant is sharing a sleep surface with someone else; the factors associated with bedsharing are also associated with SIDS."

Bassinets allow for roomsharing without bedsharing. According to Drs. Pike and Moon, "If parents plan to use a bassinet, they should make sure that it is in good repair and conforms to CPSC guidelines." The CPSC calls for bassinets to have a sturdy bottom with a wide base, smooth surfaces without protruding hardware, legs with locks, and a firm, snugly fitting mattress. Because 6 of the 53 infants were found with their faces wedged against the side of the bassinet, the authors suggest that a bassinet with sides made of an air permeable material, such as mesh, may be safer. They also emphasize that parents should always lay infants on their backs and never put loose items like blankets or pillows in the bassinet with the baby.

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