

# Preventing sudden infant death from unsafe sleep environments

5 November 2014, by Bryan Goodchild And Sandra Gray

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Pediatricians are advocating for safe infant sleep practices, concerned by too many sudden unexplained infant deaths in recent years and a rise in bed-sharing among families with infants. According to UMass Medical School pediatrician Linda Sagor, MD, MPH, most of these deaths could have been prevented.

"There are just too many deaths attributable to unsafe sleep, which I will continue to stress are mostly preventable," said Dr. Sagor, clinical professor of pediatrics and a consultant to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. "Reviews of these deaths have determined that many, if not most, are related to unsafe sleep positions and unsafe sleep environments, such as [bed](#) sharing."

Sudden unexpected infant [death](#) is the leading cause of death among infants under age 1. After the Centers for Disease Control and National Institutes of Health launched the Back to Sleep campaign in 1994 to raise public awareness that infants are safest sleeping on their backs, the incidence of SIDS declined by more than 50 percent. But in recent years the decline has leveled off, pointing to other causes for what is still an unacceptable level of preventable [sudden infant deaths](#).

"The major issue now is bed sharing and couch sharing," said Sagor. "Unfortunately, what we have found is that [bed sharing](#) has increased."

Responding to this trend, in 2011 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a revised policy on safe sleep. In addition to the continuing recommendation to put all babies to sleep on their backs in a crib with a firm surface free of blankets, pillows, bumpers, quilts and stuffed animals, it also advises no bed or couch sharing—not even for a brief rest.

"As [health care providers](#) we have a very important

role to play in advising our patients—and helping them keep their children safe through the first few months of life," said Sagor. "We are doing everything in our practice to make sure our patients understand what constitutes safe sleep practices."

Provided by University of Massachusetts Medical School

APA citation: Preventing sudden infant death from unsafe sleep environments (2014, November 5) retrieved 7 July 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-11-sudden-infant-death-unsafe-environments.html>

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