

When a healthy baby dies suddenly and unexpectedly, the term SUDI is used. This stands for Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy and covers all infant deaths, regardless of the cause. While SUDI is most common for infants under 6 months of age, it can occur in older children. If a child under the age of twelve months dies suddenly and unexpectedly whilst asleep, and no cause of death can be found following investigation and post mortem examination, this is referred to as SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Infants are most at risk of SIDS in the first three months, but safe sleep practice should be followed for the first twelve months of life as babies are at risk during this time.

Infants may be discovered in their own cot or crib, sharing a sleep space such as an adult bed, sofa or chair, in their pram, car seat or infant carrier. SIDS can occur during any sleep period, not just a night time sleep. The majority are not witnessed and the baby or young child is often discovered by a parent/carer when they waken or go to check on them. There may no sign of a struggle, or of any distress.

SUDI by definition are deaths which are not expected 24 hours before, however we have a growing knowledge of risk factors associated with these deaths including smoking, alcohol and drug use. Research continues to help us understand more about SUDI.

Reason for Sharing this Information



SUDI is the most common cause of death for infants between 1 and 12 months old, whilst there is a decline in the number of SUDI deaths, approximately 200 babies die suddenly and unexpectedly each year. This statistic may sound alarming, SUDI is rare and the risk of a baby dying from it is low, however there is more we can all do to help prevent future deaths.

This practitioner briefing is as a result of seeing an increase in cases of SUDI both locally, regionally and nationally which identified there had been unsafe sleeping practices to help raise awareness for those practitioners working with families to enable them to promote safe sleep messages and help prevent future deaths.

A number of local and national reviews have identified learning around smoking and the use of alcohol and cannabis by parents. Typically, reviews have highlighted the need to increase practitioner awareness of the risks posed to babies, their confidence to effectively challenge parents during assessments.

All professionals working with families should be repeating and reinforcing messages about safe sleeping, it is not just for Midwives and Health Visitors to provide these messages to parents.

You can learn more about SUDI through the 'Eyes On the Baby' training, details provided in this briefing.

Safe Sleeping Advice

Safe sleeping position and recommended temperatures

The safest sleeping position for a baby is on their back and not on their front or side. A baby should sleep in their own clear, flat, separate sleep space such as a cot or Moses basket and in the same room as parents where possible, sleep space should not include items such as pillows, duvets or cot bumpers. Babies should **never** be left to sleep on a sofa or in an armchair (with or without another person). Parents should also consider the risks of any temporary sleeping arrangements, such as sleeping in the living room.



It is important to make sure that the baby is at a comfortable temperature – not too hot or too cold. The chance of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is higher in babies who get too hot, the recommended room temperature is **16-20°C**.

Key Messages on smoking, alcohol and cannabis use

There is evidence linking alcohol, cannabis and passive smoking to SIDS and all parents need to be aware of the potential consequences of not adhering to safe sleeping practice. Do you as a practitioner routinely ask about smoking, alcohol, drugs and medication? Do you address with parents how they will avoid falling asleep with the baby in an unsafe place?

Smoking

Parents should never sleep in the same bed as their baby if they smoke (even if they don't smoke in the bedroom). Parents should ensure they keep baby smoke free during pregnancy and after birth and do not let people smoke near the baby and keep the home, car, and other places baby spends time, smoke free (it's illegal to smoke in a car or other vehicle if anyone under the age of 18 is present.)



Alcohol, cannabis use and prescribed medication

Parents should never sleep in the same bed as their baby if they drink alcohol or take drugs or are extremely tired. Cannabis (and other drug use including some prescribed medication) and alcohol can affect the brain and potentially impact on an individual's ability to make wise decisions. Practitioners need to be mindful that although adults who may use cannabis or drink alcohol may have intrinsically good parenting skills—they may be unable to exercise them consistently.

Remember - parents may at times feel judged so may find being told what to do difficult and may become defensive or resistant. Take time to empathise with how hard it is to be a parent and have open discussions to ensure that they understand the rationale for advice. Highlight the risks of using alcohol / drugs / medication that may make them drowsy whilst caring for a baby.

SIDS in numbers. Reduce the risk.



**1 PER
3,817**

The current unexplained infant death rate in the UK for live births.



182

SIDS claims the lives of approximately 182 babies every year in the UK; that's around 3 babies a week

50%

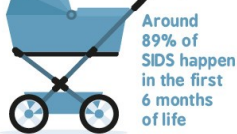


Sharing a room with your baby can halve the risk of SIDS



6x
An infant placed on their front to sleep is up to 6 times more at risk of SIDS than one placed on their back

89%



Around 89% of SIDS happen in the first 6 months of life

81%

The rate of SIDS in England and Wales has reduced by 81% since the Back to Sleep message was launched in 1991

5x



Babies born at low birth weight are 5 times more at risk of SIDS than babies born at a normal birth weight



50x

Sleeping on a sofa with a baby can increase the chance of SIDS by up to 50 times



63%

Boys are more at risk of SIDS than girls – 63% of unexplained infant deaths were boys in 2021



4x

In 2021 the SIDS rate was almost 4 times higher among mums under 20 compared to all other age groups



1/3

Over a third of SIDS deaths could be avoided if no women smoked during pregnancy

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Eyes on the Baby



Eyes on the Baby

Eyes on the Baby training is now available for all professionals on the [Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Me Learning training portal](#). The training will help practitioners give advice about safer sleeping to help reduce SUDI. There are different levels relating to the job role of the individual. DSP has also supported the development of a Podcast—you can also access the Eyes on the Baby Podcast [here](#).

Want to Learn More?

Safer Sleep for Babies video - [click here to watch](#)

NHS (Reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome) — [click here](#)

The Lullaby Trust (safer sleep advice) — [click here](#)

Out of Routine: A review of SIDS in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm—[click here](#)

Unicef (co-sleeping and SIDS) — [click here](#)

NSPCC—Parents with substance use problems— [click here](#)

Sands (advice and support regarding baby loss) — [click here](#)

