



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Honouring Our Babies Toolkit: Safe Sleep

A SUMMARY FOR FAMILIES

Babies are blessings

Many First Nations and Aboriginal teachings share that babies are gifts of life from the Creator and that it is a great blessing to be able to love, protect and care for these precious little beings. Many teachings also tell that each baby, child, adult and Elder is a vital part of the community and needs to be spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically balanced in order for all to enjoy a healthy and good life. The importance of this balance is taught by many Elders, who also teach about the circle of life – from birth to death. Unfortunately, some babies' lives are cut short as a result of sleep-related infant deaths.



Sadly, there are sleep-related infant deaths

Sudden Infant Death (SIDS) is the sudden, unexpected and unexplained death of a baby under the age of one. It is the most common cause of death in babies between the ages of one month and one year, with 90% of deaths occurring before six months. The exact causes are unknown. Scientific research indicates that babies who die of sleep-related infant death may have been more vulnerable to internal influences (eg. a medical condition) and external influences (eg. tobacco smoke). There is no known way to prevent or predict these deaths but there are ways to reduce the baby's risk.

There are also accidental deaths that occur as a result of certain sleep-related practices, such as placing the baby in the bed lying face down, or the parent rolling onto the baby, which can lead to suffocation. These are preventable.

Protecting your baby from sleep-related infant deaths: Goals to work towards

- Place your baby on his or her back to sleep every time (at night and for naps).
- Ensure your baby has a tobacco-free environment, during pregnancy and after birth.
- Have your baby sleep in the same room as you for the first six months, on a separate sleep surface.
- Breastfeed your baby. Breastfeeding provides some protection.
- Ensure your baby sleeps on his or her own firm mattress. Adult mattresses, waterbeds, couches, recliners and sheepskins are too soft for babies to sleep on safely.
- Ensure your baby's sleeping area is free of hazards, including loose blankets, pillows, and toys.
- Ensure your baby does not overheat while sleeping (avoid hats indoors, blankets, or swaddling).
- Ensure that your baby's hands and arms are free to move and are not swaddled by a blanket when sleeping. This allows the baby to potentially move an object if one falls on his or her face.
- Ensure your baby's crib or other sleep equipment meets the safety standards regulations. Cribs that do not meet Canadian standards should not be used.
- When your baby is sleeping at someone else's house, make sure your baby's sleep area is safe.

How to make your baby's sleep as safe as possible

Sometimes, working towards the goals listed above can be challenging. For example, you or someone who you live with might have difficulty stopping smoking or you might be visiting a friend or family member's house where there isn't a crib available.

Some ideas to help make your baby's sleep as safe as possible include:

- If you or a family member living with you smokes, smoke outside and away from the house, wearing a shirt or jacket that you can take off and leave outside or away from your baby.
- Decreasing the number of cigarettes, practicing short term quits and trying the patch or other nicotine replacement therapies are all helpful steps to support you and your baby's wellness.
- On long car rides, try to take breaks to monitor and re-position your baby and attend to their other needs.
- If your baby falls asleep during tummy time, turn your baby on his or her back and let him or her continue sleeping.
- If you don't have a crib or cradle available to use, there are a number of alternative sleep surface options out there at little or no cost. For example, any of the following can provide firm sleep surfaces:
 - A sturdy laundry basket with a smooth, firm bottom.
 - A heavy, reinforced cardboard box.
 - A drawer from your dresser, kitchen or desk.
- If you are taking medications that might make you sleepy, place your baby on a firm sleep surface beside your bed and if possible, ask someone to help watch your baby.



Please talk to a trusted health provider with any questions that you have about safe sleep practices.

For more information about the Honouring Our Babies Toolkit: Safe Sleep resource, please visit the First Nations Health Authority website and look for an e-copy of the discussion cards: www.fnha.ca/wellnessContent/Wellness/HOB_SafeSleep_IllustratedCards.pdf

OTHER MATERNAL, CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH RESOURCES:

- Our Sacred Journey: Aboriginal Pregnancy Passport: www.fnha.ca/wellnessContent/Wellness/AboriginalPregnancyPassport.pdf
- Parents as First Teachers: www.fnha.ca/wellnessContent/Wellness/parentteacher.pdf
- Growing Up Healthy: www.fnha.ca/wellnessContent/Wellness/growingup.pdf
- Fatherhood is Forever: www.fnha.ca/wellnessContent/Wellness/fatherforever.pdf