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The Importance of Safe Sleep

While the image of an infant resting in a crib on its stomach with blankets, pillows and soft teddy bears makes for a cute picture, it's unsafe. Sleeping on the stomach is associated with SIDS—Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following for safe sleep:

- **Every infant be placed to sleep on its back until one year old.**
- **Use a firm mattress with a fitted sheet.**
- **Keep soft things like blankets, toys, and bumpers out of cribs.**



— Infant Safe Sleep —

Infant sleeping positions... why are they so important?



Nationally the leading cause of death for infants one-month to one-year old is SIDS. For the period 2005 – 2009, Delaware reported that SIDS accounted for eight percent of infant deaths, was the second leading cause of death in black infants, and for white and Hispanic infants SIDS was the third and sixth leading cause of death, respectively.

Most deaths occur between one and four months of age. Black infants are twice as likely to die of SIDS than white infants.

While there is no definitive cause for SIDS deaths, there are major risk factors; two of which involve improper sleeping for infants:

SIDS risk factors:

- Maternal smoking, drinking and/or drug use during pregnancy;
- poor prenatal care;
- low birth weight or prematurity;

- overheating in sleep wear and/or bedding;
- Infants sleeping on stomach.

Increased risk of death arises with a combination of factors such as stomach sleeping along with soft bedding. The infant re-breathes air that is trapped in soft bedding and is not able to adjust their position adequately, possibly suffocating from oxygen depleted air.

The Delaware Child Death Near Death and Stillbirth Commission provides recommendations to prevent the deaths and/or near deaths of children, and improve the systems that provide services to children. Ultimately the reviews determine any system problems requiring change, then make recommendations and assist with change. During Delaware's fiscal year 2011, 11 infant deaths due to unsafe sleeping were reviewed; six of those were associated with the infant not sleeping on its back.

Safe sleeping is having an unobstructed, firm mattress and the child is on his or her back.

Educating parents, caregivers and health providers on the importance of safe sleeping for infants has been identified as a critical step to avoid these preventable tragedies. Both statewide and nationally, efforts to educate are continuous; by promoting safe sleeping for infants we can actually reduce the numbers of infant death. ■

The Safe To Sleep Campaign

The Safe to Sleep campaign (formerly known as the Back to Sleep campaign) began in 1994 as a way to educate parents, caregivers, and health care providers about ways to reduce the risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

The campaign was initially named for its recommendation to place healthy babies on their backs to sleep, which has been shown to reduce the risk for SIDS, also known as "crib death." However, too-soft bedding or other sleep-related risk factors for SIDS exist and should not be overlooked; the campaign changed its name to encompass a wider overall message.

This campaign has been successful in promoting safe sleeping strategies for infants.



So whose babies are back-sleeping?

Graphs portray percentages of babies who are back-sleeping.

Figure 1. Infant Sleep Position on Back by Race/Ethnicity. Delaware PRAMS 2009

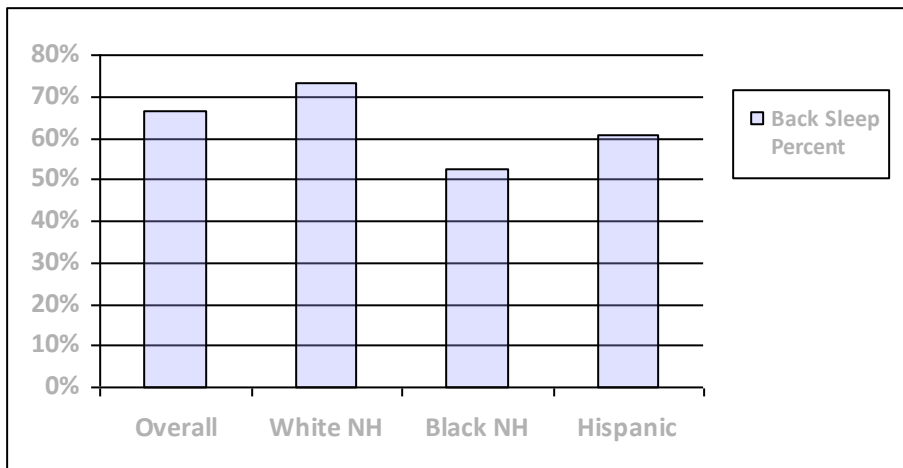
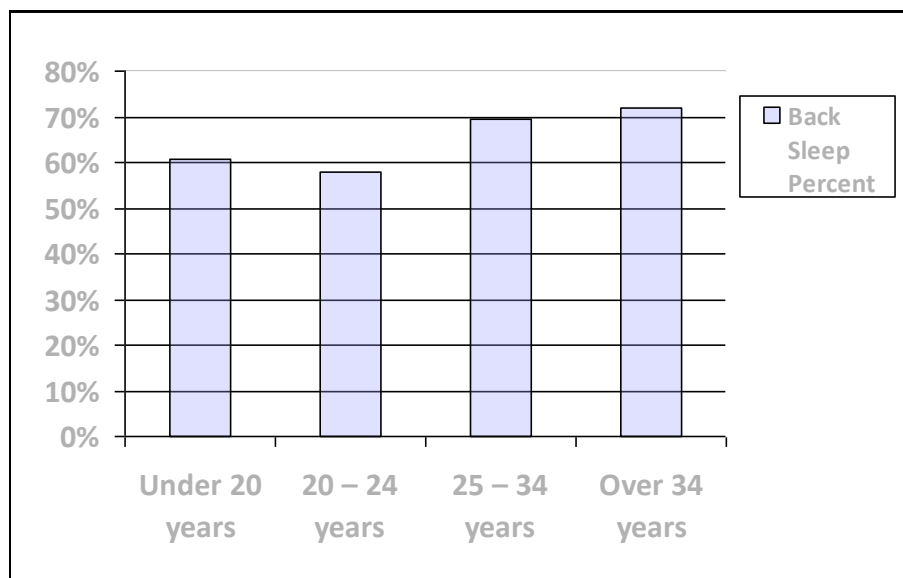


Figure 2. Infant Sleep Position on Back by Mother's Age. Delaware PRAMS 2009



PRAMS survey question was "In which one position do you most often lay your baby down to sleep?" The choices were side, back or stomach. The PRAMS data reflect live births of Delaware mothers during 2009.

References:

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/sids.cfm>
Accessed 8/27/2012

Delaware Health Statistics Center. Delaware Vital Statistics Annual Report, 2009. Delaware Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health: 2011.

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<http://www.cdc.gov/SIDS/>
Accessed 8/27/2012

Child Death, Near Death and Stillbirth Commission Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2011. State of Delaware Child Death, Near Death and Stillbirth Commission: 2012.

More detailed information and educational resources about SIDS, safe sleeping, and Delaware health statistics can be found at:

sidscenter.org/

nichd.nih.gov/SIDS/

dhss.delaware.gov/dph/hp/healthstats.html

www.aap.org/