

News Release



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Unique coalition launches campaign to encourage safe infant sleep

Goal is to reduce infant deaths that occur when someone falls asleep with a baby

A unique coalition of organizations is beginning a statewide campaign to raise awareness about the risks to infants when someone falls asleep with them. It is estimated that about 20 infants die each year in Minnesota from this type of unsafe sleeping condition. Because the practice of adults sleeping with an infant in bed or on a sofa is so common, many may be at risk.

“The death of any infant is tragic, but it’s especially tragic when it is entirely preventable,” said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dianne Mandernach “The goal of this campaign is to help parents understand that it is dangerous to fall asleep with an infant.”

The coalition sponsoring the campaign includes the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Human Services, Minnesota Sudden Infant Death Center of Children’s Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota, Minnesota Coroners’ and Medical Examiners’ Association and Twin Cities Healthy Start.

The campaign consists of two key components:

- The Minnesota Coroners’ and Medical Examiners’ Association recently sent a letter to health care providers including obstetricians, pediatricians and family practice physicians to make them aware of the number of infant deaths resulting from infants and adults sharing a bed or other unsafe sleep circumstances. The association encouraged health care providers to discuss with parents the safe infant sleep practices recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). It is unique for public health messages such as these to be championed by medical examiners.
- “Safe & Asleep” educational materials are being distributed through local public health agencies, tribal health representatives, Positive Alternative programs, hospitals, and many community-based organizations. Materials were made available at the Infant Mortality Awareness Campaign’s Healthy Family Fair in Como Park on July 25, 2007. This event was sponsored by Twin Cities Healthy Start, with many collaborating partners, including MDH, the March of Dimes, and health plans.

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The educational materials are designed to make families aware that falling asleep with their infants poses serious risks to the infant's safety. The safest place for babies to sleep is alone in their own crib. Babies can suffocate when sleeping with others who may unintentionally roll over on them or just lay their arm across the baby's chest. Babies can also suffocate by getting trapped in adult bedding or on sleep surfaces not designed with infant safety in mind. Babies should always sleep on their backs and in a safe crib, bassinet or play yard with a firm mattress and no pillows or excess bedding.

The importance of this prevention message led to the unique partnerships that created this campaign. As a result, a variety of diverse and committed organizations and programs offered their resources and expertise to develop and promote the "Safe & Asleep" information.

"We are especially pleased to be a part of this effort," said Quinn Strobl, M.D. President of the Minnesota Coroners' and Medical Examiners' Association. It is a unique opportunity for us to become involved with public health campaigns. As we see the tragic outcomes of babies sleeping in unsafe conditions, we felt it was important for us to help spread the word that these deaths can be prevented."

The AAP "Safe Sleep Top 10" recommendations are designed to reduce the risk of an infant dying unexpectedly from unsafe sleeping conditions as well as SIDS:

1. Always place baby on his or her back to sleep, for both naps and at night.
2. Place baby on a firm sleep surface such as on a safety-approved crib mattress, covered by a fitted sheet.
3. Keep soft objects, toys and loose bedding out of the baby's sleep area.
4. Do not allow smoking around baby.
5. Keep baby's sleep area close to, but separate from, where you and others sleep.
6. Think about using a clean pacifier when placing baby down to sleep.
7. Do not let baby overheat during sleep.
8. Avoid commercial products that claim to reduce the risk of SIDS.
9. Do not use home breathing monitors to reduce the risk of SIDS. They are not effective for that purpose. Also, avoid medically prescribed apnea monitors, which have not been shown to reduce the risk of SIDS.
10. Reduce the chance that flat spots may develop on the back side of your baby's head; provide tummy time when baby is awake

More information about how to keep babies safe during sleep and the campaign's educational materials can be found at www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/mch/infamort.html.