

UQ researchers reject statement that co-sleeping is dangerous

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Researchers from UQ's Queensland Centre for Mothers & Babies are concerned about recent messages that parents should never sleep in the same bed as their babies.

QCMB Director Professor Sue Kruske said a recent comment by the Victorian Coroner, who labelled it “inherently dangerous” for a parent to sleep in the same bed as an infant younger than a year old, was not representing current evidence.

“It is not the act of bed sharing that is solely responsible for these deaths,” Professor Kruske said.

“Rather it is other environmental factors that occur in combination with bed sharing.”

She said the vast majority of these 'co-sleeping deaths' were in the context of other circumstances including smoking, alcohol and drug use and unsafe adult sleep environments.

“Prohibiting bed-sharing will actually lead to more harmful practices such as falling asleep with the baby on a couch, which is known to be dangerous, as well as increased cases of babies falling,” she said.

She said research showed many benefits for babies who bed-share safely with their parents, including improved breastfeeding duration rates, improved settling with reduced crying, more infant arousals which are

protective for baby, and improved maternal sleep.

Dr Jeanine Young, Chair of SIDS and Kids National Scientific Advisory Group and safe infant sleep expert, said inconsistent messages were making it hard for parents to make informed decisions.

“To make sweeping statements about this practice would require reliable prevalence data,” Dr Young said.

“We know from the studies we have done that shared sleeping is understandably very common for families in Australia especially for breastfeeding parents.

"If deaths could be ascribed to co-sleeping without other risk factors present, we would expect a lot more.

“No environment for babies is risk free.

"Babies have died alone in cots and babies have died in adult beds.

"We give clear advice for reducing risks in cot environments but we have not yet addressed shared sleep environments in the same way.

“Many people die in car accidents but we don't tell people not to drive.

"We tell them not to drink and drive, to wear seat belts and not speed.

“Similarly, the message for parents is that if you choose, or have no option but to co-sleep, the risks can be reduced by not overheating the baby, not wrapping the baby while bed-sharing, not having either parents as smokers, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

“We also know that premature or unwell [babies](#) are at higher risk of

sudden infant death.”

Provided by University of Queensland

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