

Nearly 55 percent of US infants sleep with potentially unsafe bedding

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In a safe sleep environment, the baby's sleep area has no bumpers, pillows, blankets or toys. Room sharing -- keeping baby's sleep area in the same room where caregivers sleep -- reduces the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death. Mothers who bring the infant into bed to breastfeed should make sure to put him or her back in a separate sleep area in the room, such as a safety-approved crib, bassinet, or portable play area, when the infant is finished. Credit: National Institutes of Health.

Nearly 55 percent of U.S. infants are placed to sleep with bedding that increases the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS, despite recommendations against the practice, report researchers at the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other institutions.

Soft objects and loose bedding—such as thick blankets, quilts, and pillows—can obstruct an infant's airway and pose a suffocation risk, according to the NIH's Safe to Sleep campaign. Soft bedding has also been shown to increase the risk of SIDS. Infants should be placed to sleep alone, on their backs, on a firm sleep surface, such as in a mattress in a safety-approved crib, covered by a fitted sheet. Soft objects, toys, crib bumpers, quilts, comforters and loose bedding should be kept out of the baby's sleep area.

Based on responses from nearly 20,000 caregivers, the researchers reported that, although such potentially unsafe bedding use declined from 85.9 percent in 1993-1995, it still remained high, at 54.7 percent, in 2008-2010.

"Parents have good intentions but may not understand that blankets, quilts and pillows increase a baby's risk of SIDS and accidental suffocation," said the study's first author, Carrie K. Shapiro-Mendoza, Ph.D., M.P.H., senior scientist in the CDC's Division of Reproductive Health in Atlanta.

The current study is an analysis of data from the National Infant Sleep Position Survey (NISP), which collected information on the influence of [infant sleep](#) position and other safe sleep recommendations on infant care practices. Funded by the NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the survey

collected information by telephone from a random sample of more than 1,000 caregivers in U.S. households from 1992-2010.

"Parents receive a lot of mixed messages," said study author Marian Willinger, Ph.D., special assistant for SIDS at the NIH's Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "Relatives may give them quilts or fluffy blankets as presents for the new baby, and they feel obligated to use them. Or they see magazine photos of babies with potentially unsafe bedding items. But babies should be placed for sleep on a firm, safety approved mattress and fitted sheet, without any other bedding."

Drs. Shapiro-Mendoza and Willinger conducted the analysis with colleagues at CDC, the Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut, the Boston University School of Public Health and the Boston University School of Medicine. The study was published online in *Pediatrics*.

SIDS is the unexplained death of a child within the first year of life. In 1992, the AAP issued its recommendation that [infants](#) be put to sleep on their backs. Two years later, the NICHD and its partners launched the Back to Sleep campaign, later renamed Safe to Sleep. The rate of SIDS in the United States has fallen 50 percent since 1992. However, since 2000, the SIDS rate has declined slowly, and researchers have reported an increase in other unexpected infant deaths, resulting from such causes as accidental suffocation, entrapment in bedding material or other causes. These accidental suffocation deaths have increased from 7.0 per every 100,000 live births in 2000 to 15.9 in 2010.

As part of the survey, caregivers were asked whether infants were placed to sleep on such items as blankets, bean bag chairs, rugs, sheepskin, cushions, or pillows. Caregivers were also asked about whether the infant was covered with such bedding materials as a blanket, quilt or

comforter, sheepskin, or a pillow. The Safe to Sleep campaign advises against blankets or other coverings, and recommends sleep clothing, such as a one-piece sleeper, and keeping the room at a comfortable temperature.

"Bedding use for infant sleep remains common despite recommendations against this practice," the study authors wrote.

By 2007-2010, most respondents reported following these Safe to Sleep recommendations: placing the infant to sleep in a crib or bassinet, placing the infant on his or her back, and not sharing a sleep surface with the infant. However, use of bedding was consistently 50 percent or higher for each of these years.

From 1993-1995 to 2008-2010, covering with thick blankets declined from 56 percent to 27.4 percent and covering with quilts or comforters declined from 39.2 percent to 7.9 percent. However, the authors did not see significant declines such bedding materials placed under infants, with 25.5 percent-31.9 percent reporting placing blankets under infants and 3.1 percent-4.6 percent placing cushions under infants.

"Interestingly, we also observed a greater decline in bedding use over the infants (quilts/comforters and thick blankets) compared with bedding (blankets) under infants," the study authors wrote. "This finding raises a concern that parents may incorrectly perceive the recommendations as only pertaining to items covering or around the infant, and not include items under the infant."

The researchers speculate that among the reasons mothers used bedding were to provide warmth and comfort or to prevent falls from an adult bed or sofa by using pillows as a barricade. They noted that a study of images from popular magazines targeting women of childbearing age found that more than two thirds of these images showed infants sleeping

with potentially hazardous bedding such as blankets and pillows.

"Seeing images such as these may reinforce beliefs and perceptions that having these items in the infant [sleep](#) area is not only a favorable practice, but also the norm," the researchers wrote.

Provided by NIH/National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

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