

Half of childcare centres fail cot mattress safety test

February 23 2015, by David Ellis

Public health researchers at the University of Adelaide are hoping to raise awareness among childcare centres of the potentially deadly consequences of using cot mattresses that are too soft.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) has been linked to a number of risk factors associated with sleep practices and environment, including the relationship between a soft sleep surface and infant death.

In 2013, a new voluntary standard was introduced by Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand to define a firm enough sleep surface for infants.

However, in a study of 28 childcare centres in the Adelaide metropolitan area, University of Adelaide researchers found that half of the centres had at least one infant mattress that did not comply with the standard. Of the 145 mattresses tested at the centres, 57 of them (or 39.3%) failed the minimum firmness test.

"To the best of our knowledge, this was the first audit of its kind in the world, and the results were both surprising and disappointing," says one of the study's supervisors, Mr Paul Rothmore from the University's School of Population Health.

"We know that if a sleep surface fails the test outlined by the standard, on average it has a three times greater risk of killing a child from suffocation.

"Given that almost a third of Australian children under the age of two years spend time in childcare, it is important that these environments are kept as safe as possible," Mr Rothmore says.

The study was conducted by University of Adelaide Bachelor of Health Sciences student McKeely Maney, who used a device outlined in the standard to test the softness of mattresses.

"If a mattress was deemed 'too soft', the centre was advised that they should replace the mattress as soon as possible," Ms Maney says.

"Some centres also placed blankets and pillows under mattresses, propping them up, creating an uneven and unsafe surface.

"While the results of the audit were alarming, it was refreshing to see that many childcare centres were receptive and welcoming of safety testing, and willing to do something about the problem once it was highlighted to them," she says.

Mr Rothmore says: "There was a general lack of awareness of the voluntary standard and 'softness' as a risk factor for infant suffocation. An easy way to address this hazard would be to make the standard mandatory, and to regularly test mattresses in [childcare](#) centres.

If just one child's life can be saved by making a few simple changes, it would be worth it."

Provided by University of Adelaide

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