

Researchers find air mattresses present a growing safety risk to infants, recommend changes

May 18 2017



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Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the University of Georgia have found that as air mattresses become

increasingly popular, the inflatable beds place infants at great risk for sleep-related death. They call for a greater recognition of air mattress use in both policy statements and data collection about infant deaths.

Writing in the *American Journal of Public Health*, Jennifer Doering, associate professor of nursing at UWM, and Trina Salm Ward, assistant professor with a joint appointment in the School of Social Work and College of Public Health at UGA, note that the mattresses' low cost and portability are attractive features in low income, transient populations. But their design brings a risk.

"Even when fully inflated, air mattresses can mold to the infant's face and obstruct the airway by forming an occlusive seal," they write. "The risk increases when air mattresses leak during use. Under-inflation was a factor in some of the [infant deaths](#) reviewed."

The National Child Death Review Case Reporting System has recorded 108 infant deaths involving air mattresses in 24 states between 2004 and 2015. However, Doering and Salm Ward suggest that infant deaths are underreported because of the limited numbers of states and variations in when those states began reported to the system. Moreover, "air mattress" is not an explicit choice on the reporting form.

The researchers examined policy statements from 12 leading organizations, including federal agencies, professional provider organizations, health professional and consumer organizations and parent organizations. They found only one that mentioned the hazard to [infants](#) presented by air mattresses.

They note that other common bedding options, including mattress toppers and mattresses with adjustable firmness, present an unrecognized hazard because they have not been adequately distinguished from traditional spring mattresses.

Doering and Salm Ward offer several recommendations to improve consumer messaging about air mattresses. They suggest, for example, that [public health](#) organizations should explicitly warn about the hazard of air mattresses when providing information about low-cost bedding options as a way to combat bedbug infestations.

They also call for changes in [data collection](#), for example to include hazardous sleeping surfaces in reports on infant deaths. They also recommend that researchers specifically ask about use of air mattresses and air components in traditional mattresses when assessing infant sleep location.

Provided by University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

Citation: Researchers find air mattresses present a growing safety risk to infants, recommend changes (2017, May 18) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-05-air-mattresses-safety-infants.html>

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