

## **Report: Every sudden infant death deserves a closer look**

August 27 2019

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Whenever a healthy infant dies suddenly, that death should be

investigated to determine if abuse or neglect was the cause.

So claims a new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association of Medical Examiners.

In 2019, [infants](#) younger than 1 year accounted for nearly half of 1,750 [child](#) maltreatment deaths in the United States. However, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System says many child abuse deaths are missed and estimates that the actual number is more than triple what is officially reported.

"It is important that we correctly identify deaths that occurred from abuse or neglect, because when they are missed, it leaves other children at risk," report co-author Dr. Erich Batra said in an AAP news release.

"A review team made up of professionals from various related fields—including the medical, [child welfare](#) and law enforcement communities—should review all data and prevention strategies with every case," Batra said.

"When a baby dies of unknown causes, there must be a thorough investigation that includes a comprehensive review of the medical history, a scene investigation and an autopsy with appropriate testing," report lead author Dr. Vincent Palusci said in the release.

"Investigators should remain sensitive, unbiased and nonjudgmental when they talk with parents, who will need additional support for grief and stress," Palusci added.

A full assessment of a sudden unexpected death of a healthy infant should include: careful history-taking by [emergency responders](#) and medical personnel that's provided to the medical examiner or coroner; prompt investigation with doll reenactment at the scene where the infant

was found; interviews with families and [household members](#) by police, death investigators, prosecutors and child protective services; a complete autopsy within 24 hours of death.

The AAP also called for fully funded child [death](#) investigation and review systems, and funding for research into the causes, identification and prevention of sudden infant deaths.

The report was published online Aug. 26 in *Pediatrics*.

**More information:** The U.S. Children's Bureau has more on [child abuse and neglect](#).

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