

# New recommendations in bedsharing debate

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Researchers from Murdoch University's School of Health Professions are urging health organisations to reconsider their attitudes to mothers and babies bedsharing.

Associate Professor Catherine Fetherston said Australian and overseas agencies' warnings against bedsharing were not well supported by evidence and did not meet the needs of mothers and babies.

"Current policies are focussed on risk elimination – 'do not sleep with your baby, because they might die' – when really there is no research that shows an inherent risk for bedsharing and [Sudden Infant Death Syndrome](#) (SIDS)," Professor Fetherston said.

"What we should be focusing on is minimising the known risks associated with SIDS and bedsharing, such as parents who smoke or are affected by alcohol and drugs."

She said a recent [Alaskan study](#) found that 99 per cent of bedsharing deaths involved either maternal smoking or sleeping with someone affected by substances.

Professor Fetherston said another critical risk factor was unsuitable environments, which could involve too much soft bedding, sleeping with siblings or pets and sofa-sleeping.

"Often when researchers look at bedsharing, they include sofa-sharing or armchair-sharing, which have been shown to be very dangerous, with a number of associated deaths," she said.

"In fact, when you remove deaths associated with sofa-sharing from the analysis, the rate of bedsharing deaths is lower than the rate found in babies sleeping by themselves in cots."

She added that more could be done by agencies to highlight breastfeeding's role in protecting against SIDS, saying [breastfed babies](#) who bedshared benefited physiologically, with more stable temperatures and [heart rhythms](#), better [oxygen saturation](#) and fewer pauses in breathing.

"While we accept the need for preventative strategies to reduce sleep-related [infant deaths](#), we believe health agencies should shift from absolute messages discouraging bedsharing to messages that address known [risk factors](#).

"This more ethical approach will provide parents with information that minimises the risk for SIDS and still allows them to bedshare if they

wish to."

'Analysis of the ethical issues in the breastfeeding and bedsharing debate' has been published in *Breastfeeding Review*.

**More information:** [search.informit.com.au/browseJ ...  
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Provided by Murdoch University

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