

Car Seats

Input from First Candle/SIDS Alliance (2-6-04)

While I am not aware of a journal article or national policy statement that addresses car seats and carriers specifically ? we do know of many studies, articles and national recommendations that show that the safest place for a baby to sleep is in a safety approved crib, on its back, on a firm flat surface with no soft, loose or fluffy bedding in the sleep area. If, by circumstance or choice, parents choose a sleep area other than a safety-approved crib, it is still important that this vision of a safe sleep area be duplicated.

There are several problems inherent with car seats and carriers: the angle at which the baby sits/sleeps can be such that the baby's head can tip forward, potentially causing problems; due to the sometimes "enclosed" nature of these products (sides that come up around the baby's head, soft padding on the interior, soft padded "bumpers" that parents sometimes add to the seats), the potential for rebreathing carbon dioxide increases when a baby's head turns to the side; and the potential for overheating exists, again because of the enclosed nature of the products and the possibility that the baby may be left in clothing appropriate for outdoor use and not indoor use.

As a result, and to eliminate as much risk as possible, First Candle/SIDS Alliance recommends that if a baby falls asleep in a car seat or carrier, they be removed and placed in a safe sleep area as soon as one is available.

Another point I would like to add to the ongoing discussion on safe sleep for babies is the fact that research has shown us that some babies are more susceptible to environmental challenges such as rebreathing CO₂, overheating, second hand smoke, etc., than others. Unfortunately, at this time, there is no way to identify which babies those are. Until we can understand more about the mechanisms of death, until we can identify which babies are at risk, and/or until we have achieved widespread saturation of safe sleep practices across all populations and socioeconomic strata, it is important that all babies be cared for in a way that eliminates as much potential for these challenges as possible.