

Education of Nurses Translates to Back Sleeping at Home for Inner-City Infants

In the last 10 years, the incidence of SIDS has decreased almost 40% in the United States. This decrease is largely due to the increase in back sleeping. However, the decreased SIDS rate has not been universally observed in all populations. Specifically, African-American and inner-city families are less likely to sleep babies on their back and subsequently, have an increased risk for SIDS.

A recent study examined whether an educational intervention in a newborn nursery would change sleep practices at home and increase the number of inner-city infants sleeping on their backs. The study examined 200 families with a breakdown of 50% African-American, 25% Hispanic, 10% white, and the rest a mix of ethnic groups. Most of the families were Medicaid eligible. A group of 100 parents were interviewed before the nursery staff received an educational intervention, and a different group of 100 parents were interviewed after the intervention was completed. The intervention consisted of a 30-minute training for all nursing staff and discussed current AAP recommendations and the importance of giving appropriate advice to parents. Before the intervention, babies in the nursery were placed on their sides (79%), back (20%), and stomach (1%). After the intervention, 99% of babies in the nursery were placed on their backs. Similarly, 41% of the parents interviewed before the intervention reported that a clinician instructed them to place babies on the back for sleep, compared with 81% of parents after the intervention. Before the educational intervention, 42% of parents usually put their infants on their backs to sleep compared with 75% using the back sleep position after the intervention.

This study provides additional evidence that educational campaigns are effective in changing behaviors. The education intervention used in this study was effective in changing nursery staff behavior and subsequently parent behavior. The study also supports the idea that parents' decision on how to sleep their babies is based on what clinicians tell them and what they observe from the nursery staff. Thus, it is imperative that all parents receive a consistent message about safe sleep for babies, including information about back sleeping, the use of a firm mattress, and a smoke-free environment.

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