

News Release

UNSAFE SLEEP PRACTICES LEAD TO SIDS AND SUFFOCATION

Below is a news release on a study published in the September issue of [Pediatrics electronic pages](#), the Internet extension of *Pediatrics*, the peer-reviewed, scientific journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

For Release: Tuesday, Sept.5, 2000 5 p.m. (ET)

CHICAGO - A [new study](#) concludes that bedsharing, as well as placing babies to sleep on surfaces other than cribs, can increase the risk of infant death.

The study is published this month on *Pediatrics electronic pages*. Researchers from St. Louis University School of Medicine, Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and the Offices of the Medical Examiner of the City of St. Louis and of St. Louis County, reviewed death-scene information from 119 infant deaths. The deaths occurred between 1994 and 1997 in and around St. Louis. Of the 119 deaths, the diagnosis was Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in 88, accidental suffocation in 16, and undetermined in 15.

The deaths of 10 infants were associated with entrapment by a bed or other sleep surface, causing asphyxiation. In seven additional cases, records indicate the infant died after being entrapped by the body of a bedmate. The study's authors state that the incidence of entrapment by a bedmate is probably higher in reality, since the bedmate may not realize the deceased infant had once been beneath part of his or her body, or the bedmate may be reluctant to report entrapment.

Other findings from the study include the following:

- Infants were found on their stomachs in more than 60 percent of the cases.
- Infants were found on a sleep surface that was not designed for infants (adult bed, sofa or chair) in more than 75 percent of the deaths.
- Bedding covered the baby's head or face in nearly 30 percent of the cases.
- A shared sleep surface (adult bed, sofa or chair) was the site of death in almost half the cases.

The study stressed the need for public health campaigns warning parents and care providers about the dangers of unsafe sleep practice. The researchers concluded shared sleep surfaces in the U.S. are unsafe for infants, and that cribs are the safest places for babies to sleep. "In other countries and cultures where sleep surfaces may be safer, bedsharing may be less dangerous to babies," said Dr. James S. Kemp, MD, FAAP, lead author of the study. "But in the U.S., it appears that bedsharing may lead to increased risk for death because babies get trapped in the beds or beneath their bedmates, or buried in the bedding."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes that bed sharing or cosleeping may hazardous under certain conditions. Also, as part of the ["Back to Sleep" campaign](#), the AAP recommends babies be put to sleep on their backs instead of their stomachs to reduce the risk of SIDS.*

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 55,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

*AAP Policy Statement [RE9946 - "Changing Concepts of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome: Implications for Infant Sleeping Environment and Sleep Position."](#)

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