

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

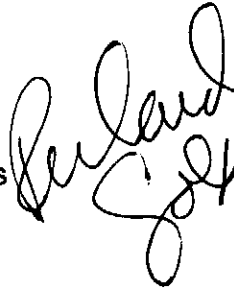
OCT 28 2008

SPECIAL TRANSMITTAL

**SUBJECT:** Safe Sleep Environment Recommendations  
For Infants One Year of Age and Younger

**TO:** County Children and Youth Administrators  
Private Children and Youth Agencies  
Other Interested Parties

**FROM:** Richard J. Gold, Deputy Secretary  
Office of Children, Youth and Families



PURPOSE:

The purpose of this transmittal is to strongly recommend that child welfare staff use the contained information and recommendations in tailoring discussions with and providing education to families they are actively working with regarding the sleep environment of infants one year of age and younger. The focus of the recommendations contained within are to ensure the immediate and ongoing safety of infants one year of age or younger.

DEFINITIONS:

For the purpose of this transmittal, the following terms have been defined as follows:

**Infant** - A child one year of age or younger.

**Safest sleeping conditions for an infant** - On their back in the same room as their caregiver. This sleep environment should be a separate sleep surface (i.e. crib, bassinet, portable crib, etc.) without any loose bedding, bumper pads, toys, etc.

**Practice of room sharing** - An infant sleeping in the same room as a caregiver, but on a separate sleep surface by themselves (i.e. bassinet, crib, portable crib, etc.).

**Practice of bed-sharing** - An infant sharing the same mattress with another individual. This does not include the sharing of a sleep surface such as a couch, chair, other soft surface, etc, which is never an acceptable sleep surface for an infant.

**Sudden Unexplained Infant Death (SUID)** - A death in which one is unable to categorize the true cause of death or determine whether it was accidental. SUID encompasses different types of infant death, including, but not limited to, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) deaths.

**SIDS** - The sudden death of an infant which remains unexplained after a thorough case investigation, including performance of a complete autopsy, examination of the death scene, and review of the clinical history.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Department of Public Welfare's (DPW) mission is to promote, improve and sustain the quality of life as well as to serve and protect vulnerable citizens. By issuing practice recommendations such as this, the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) expects that child welfare agencies across the Commonwealth will closely examine their current practices in working with families who have infants in their home or care for infants.

Like many other issues related to child rearing, a mother and an infant sharing sleep space has its fair share of opponents as well as supporters. As a result, in April of 2008, OCYF convened the first of several meetings of professionals from across the Commonwealth to discuss safe sleep practices and environments for infants. The group consisted of physicians, public and private social workers, public and private children and youth representatives, a coroner, advocates, nurses, and other professionals who came together for the sole purpose of lending their expertise toward the discussion of what a safe sleep environment for infants is and how this vulnerable population can best be protected.

OCYF, in conjunction with the above mentioned group, developed the following recommendations for caseworkers in county children and youth agencies, as well as private children and youth agency providers, to educate families with whom they are actively working.

The recommendations contained herein are meant to be used as a tool to promote the highest level of safety for those families who have an infant in their home or are caring for an infant. The recommendations are also suitable for use regardless of whether or not the families have been referred for service as a result of an injury sustained due to an unsafe sleep environment.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

In order to ensure that infants are in the safest possible sleep environment it is recommended that an infant:

- Is placed to sleep on their back;
- Sleeps on a separate sleep surface that is firm and flat (this includes a crib or bassinet);
- Sleeps in the same room and in close proximity to a caregiver;
- Sleeps on a mattress that is covered with only a sheet that fits tightly and contains no other bedding;
- Is placed in a garment such as a sleeper or sleep sack to ensure the infant's head and face do not get covered by a blanket;
- Is in an empty sleep environment that is free of bumper pads, quilts, blankets, toys, etc. ;
- Sleeps in a room that is kept between 68 and 72 degrees;
- Is never allowed to sleep on a couch, chair, water bed, or other soft surface, either alone or with anyone else;
- Is never put to sleep with heavy blankets, pillows or comforters since they could cover the infant's head and face;
- Is not over bundled;
- Is never allowed to sleep with another child; and
- Is never allowed to sleep where a pet also sleeps or may enter the environment.

As a caseworker in the home of families, it is imperative to provide caregivers with information and ensure they have an understanding of the information regarding how to keep their children safe. At the same time, it is also appropriate for the caseworkers to recognize cultural beliefs, environmental situations and other personal choices of the families with whom they are working.

When working with families who choose to share their bed with an infant even after the caseworker provides this information to them, it should be communicated that the following scenarios pose the sleeping arrangements with the most risk and should be avoided:

- Sleeping with an infant if the caregivers or others in the household smoke;
- Sleeping with an infant if the caregiver is under the influence of drugs, alcohol or other medications that can cause sleepiness;
- Sleeping with an infant if the caregiver is excessively tired;
- Sleeping with an infant younger than three months old;
- Sleeping with an infant if the caregiver is obese;
- Allowing an infant to sleep with another child; or
- Allowing an infant to sleep where a pet also sleeps or may enter the sleep environment.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Parents and caregivers must ensure a safe sleep environment for infants because a growing number of infants are injured or die as a result of entrapment, suffocation and other incidents related to unsafe sleep environments. Nationally, SUID

is the number one cause of death in infants one month of age and older. Deaths listed as SUID include situations where the caregiver rolls onto the infant's body, as well as entrapment and suffocation of infants, and other causes of death often associated with unsafe sleep environments. A significant number of infant deaths each year could be prevented.

Many states, including Pennsylvania, have programs to facilitate safe sleep environments for infants. The 'Cribs for Kids' Program, originated by *SIDS of Pennsylvania*, is a safe sleep education program for low-income caregivers to help reduce the risk of injury and death of infants due to unsafe sleep environments. Cribs for Kids Programs throughout the country and the Commonwealth provide portable cribs and educational materials regarding safe sleeping practices and tips to protect infants. More information on 'Cribs for Kids' can be found at their website, <http://www.cribsforkids.org/>.

Additional resources that caseworkers may share with families or find useful when working with families who have infants in their care may be found at:

- [http://www.achd.net/hvn/pubs/pdf/HVN\\_Tool\\_Kit6.pdf](http://www.achd.net/hvn/pubs/pdf/HVN_Tool_Kit6.pdf);
- <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/SIDS/>;
- [http://www.firstcandle.org/new\\_exp\\_parents/new\\_exp\\_safesleeptips.html](http://www.firstcandle.org/new_exp_parents/new_exp_safesleeptips.html);
- <http://www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/5030.html>;
- <http://www.aap.org/family/inffurn.html>;
- <http://www.bfmed.org/index.asp?menuID=139&firstlevelmenuID=139>; and
- <http://www.nd.edu/~jmckenn1/lab/>.

Please share this information with caseworkers who are providing direct services to families with infants in their home.