



NICHD CE Program Matte Article

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Audience: Pediatric, obstetric and neonatal nurses

Nurses Play a Critical Role in Helping Babies Sleep Safely

Parents and caregivers of newborns look to nurses for guidance about proper care for their babies. Nurses make a difference in people's lives every day, and they can expand their impact by modeling safe infant sleep strategies for families.

Each year in the United States, about 3,500 infants die suddenly of no immediately obvious cause. These deaths are classified as Sudden Unexpected Infant Death or SUID: the death of an infant younger than 1 year of age that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly. About one-half of SUID cases from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS): the sudden death of an infant that does not have a known cause even after a complete investigation, including a complete autopsy, death scene examination, and clinical history review.

Although there is no known way to prevent SIDS, there are ways to reduce the risk. The single most effective action that parents and caregivers can take to lower their baby's risk for SIDS is to place their baby to sleep on his or her back for every sleep time. Taking additional steps, like creating a safe infant sleep environment, can help reduce the risk of other sleep-related causes of infant death.

In the past 2 decades, we have made enormous progress in decreasing the SIDS rate in the United States. Since 1994, the U.S. SIDS rate has dropped by more than 60% and this is due, in part, to the combined work of health care providers, including nurses, and other safety advocates that educated parents and caregivers about safe infant sleep practices. This national awareness effort led more families to place their babies on their backs to sleep.

But there is still progress to be made. The rates of other sleep-related causes of infant death, such as accidental suffocation, continue to increase and the risk factors associated with these deaths can be controlled. Safe sleep messages need to reach every parent, grandparent, and caregiver across the nation and health care providers play a very important role in achieving this public health and safety goal.

The *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) offers a free continuing education (CE) activity for nurses about reducing the risk of SIDS and other causes of sleep-related infant death, based on the most recent recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Nurses can not only learn about risks for SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death, but also how to educate parents and caregivers about safe infant sleep and answer questions and concerns they may have about risk-reduction behaviors.

This free continuing nursing education activity was approved by the Maryland Nurses Association, an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. Nurses who successfully complete it will earn 1.1 contact hours of continuing education credit. To access the online activity, visit <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/pages/sidsnursesce.aspx>.