

# Chapter 3: Health Promotion and Protection

## 3.1 Health Promotion in Child Care

### 3.1.4 Safe Sleep

#### 3.1.4.1: Safe Sleep Practices and Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID)/SIDS Risk Reduction



Safe sleep practices help reduce the risk of sudden unexpected infant deaths (SUIDs). Facilities should develop a written policy describing the practices to be used to promote safe sleep for infants. The policy should explain that these practices aim to reduce the risk of SUIDs, including sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), suffocation and other deaths that may occur when an infant is in a crib or asleep. About 3,500 SUIDs occurred in the U.S. in 2014 (1).

All staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and others approved to enter rooms where infants are cared for should receive a copy of the Safe Sleep Policy and additional educational information and training on the importance of consistent use of safe sleep policies and practices before they are allowed to care for infants (i.e., first day as an employee/volunteer/substitute).

Documentation that training has occurred and that these individuals have received and reviewed the written policy before they care for children should be kept on file. Additional educational materials can be found at <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sts/materials/Pages/default.aspx>.

All staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and others who care for infants in the child care setting should follow these required safe sleep practices as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2):

- a. Infants up to twelve months of age should be placed for sleep in a supine position (wholly on their back) for every nap or sleep time unless an infant's primary health care provider has completed a signed waiver indicating that the child requires an alternate sleep position;
- b. Infants should be placed for sleep in safe sleep environments; which include a firm crib mattress covered by a tight-fitting sheet in a safety-approved crib (the crib should meet the standards and guidelines reviewed/approved by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission [CPSC] (3) and ASTM International [ASTM]). No monitors or positioning devices should be used unless required by the child's primary health care provider, and no other items should be in a crib occupied by an infant except for a pacifier;
- c. Infants should not nap or sleep in a car safety seat, bean bag chair, bouncy seat, infant seat, swing, jumping chair, play pen or play yard, highchair, chair, futon, sofa/couch, or any other type of furniture/equipment that is not a safety-approved crib (that is in compliance with the CPSC and ASTM safety standards) (3);
- d. If an infant arrives at the facility asleep in a car safety seat, the parent/guardian or caregiver/teacher should immediately remove the sleeping infant from this seat and place them in the supine position in a safe sleep environment (i.e., the infant's assigned crib);
- e. If an infant falls asleep in any place that is not a safe sleep environment, staff should immediately move the infant and place them in the supine position in their crib;
- f. Only one infant should be placed in each crib (stackable cribs are not recommended);
- g. Soft or loose bedding should be kept away from sleeping infants and out of safe sleep environments. These include, but are not limited to: bumper pads, pillows, quilts, comforters, sleep positioning devices, sheepskins, blankets, flat sheets, cloth diapers, bibs, etc. Also, blankets/items should not be hung on the sides of cribs. Loose or ill-fitting sheets have caused infants to be strangled or suffocated (2).
- h. Swaddling infants when they are in a crib is not necessary or recommended, but rather one-piece sleepers should be used (see [Standard 3.1.4.2](#) for more detailed information on swaddling) (2);
- i. Toys, including mobiles and other types of play equipment that are designed to be attached to any part of the crib should be kept away from sleeping infants and out of safe sleep environments;
- j. When caregivers/teachers place infants in their crib for sleep, they should check to ensure that the temperature in the room is comfortable for a lightly clothed adult, check the infants to ensure that they are comfortably clothed (not overheated or sweaty), and that bibs, necklaces, and garments with ties or hoods are removed. (Safe clothing sacks or other clothing designed for safe sleep can be used in lieu of blankets.);

- k. Infants should be directly observed by sight and sound at all times, including when they are going to sleep, are sleeping, or are in the process of waking up;
- l. Bedding should be changed between children, and if mats are used, they should be cleaned between uses.

The lighting in the room must allow the caregiver/teacher to see each infant's face, to view the color of the infant's skin, and to check on the infant's breathing and placement of the pacifier (if used).

A caregiver/teacher trained in safe sleep practices and approved to care for infants should be present in each room at all times where there is an infant. This caregiver/teacher should remain alert and should actively supervise sleeping infants in an ongoing manner. Also, the caregiver/teacher should check to ensure that the infant's head remains uncovered and re-adjust clothing as needed.

The construction and use of sleeping rooms for infants separate from the infant group room is not recommended due to the need for direct supervision. In situations where there are existing facilities with separate sleeping rooms, facilities have a plan to modify room assignments and/or practices to eliminate placing infants to sleep in separate rooms.

Facilities should follow the current recommendation of the AAP about pacifier use (2). If pacifiers are allowed, facilities should have a written policy that describes relevant procedures and guidelines. Pacifier use outside of a crib in rooms and programs where there are mobile infants or toddlers is not recommended.

The facility should encourage, provide arrangements for, and support breastfeeding. Breastfeeding or feeding an infant with their mother's expressed breast milk is also associated with a reduced risk of sleep-related infant deaths (2).

### **RATIONALE**

Despite the decrease in deaths attributed to sleeping practices and the decreased frequency of prone (tummy) infant sleep positioning over the past two decades, some caregivers/teachers continue to place infants to sleep in positions or environments that are not safe. Most sleep-related deaths in child care facilities occur in the first day or first week that an infant starts attending a child care program (4). Many of these deaths appear to be associated with prone positioning, especially when the infant is unaccustomed to being placed in that position (2). Training that includes observations and addresses barriers to changing caregiver/teacher practices would be most effective. Use of safe sleep policies, continued education of parents/guardians, expanded training efforts for child care professionals, statewide regulations and mandates, and increased monitoring and observation of infants while they are sleeping are critical to reduce the risk of SUIDs in child care (2).

Infants who are cared for by adults other than their parent/guardian or primary caregiver/teacher are at increased risk of SUID (4,5). Recent research and demonstration projects (6,7) have revealed that:

- a. Caregivers/teachers are unaware of the dangers or risks associated with prone or side infant sleep positioning, and many believe that they are using the safest practices possible, even when they are not;
- b. Although training programs are effective in improving the knowledge of caregivers/teachers, these programs alone do not always lead to changes in caregiver/teacher practices, beliefs, or attitudes; and
- c. Caregivers/teachers report the following major barriers to implementing safe sleep practices: They have been misinformed about methods shown to reduce the risk of SUID;

1) Facilities do not have or use written "safe sleep" policies or guidelines;

2) State child care regulations do not mandate the use of supine (wholly on their back) sleep position for infants in child care and/or training for infant caregivers/teachers;

3) Other caregivers/teachers or parents/guardians have objections to use of safe sleep practices, either because of their concern for choking or aspiration, and/or their concern that some infants do not sleep well in the supine position; and

4) Parents/guardians model their practices after what happens in the hospital or what others recommend. Infants who were placed to sleep in other positions in the hospital or home environments may have difficulty transitioning to supine positioning at home and later in child care.

### **COMMENTS**

Background: Deaths of infants who are asleep in child care may be under-reported because of the lack of consistency in training and regulating death scene investigations and determining and reporting cause of death. Not all states require documentation that clarifies that an infant died while being cared for by someone other than their parents/guardians.

Although the cause of many sudden infant deaths may not be known, researchers believe that some infants develop in a manner that makes it challenging for them to be aroused or to breathe when they experience a life-threatening challenge during sleep.

Although some state regulations require that caregivers/teachers "check on" sleeping infants every ten, fifteen, or thirty minutes, an infant can suffocate or die in only a few minutes. It is for this reason that the standards above discourage toys or mobiles in cribs and recommend direct, active, and ongoing supervision when infants are falling to sleep, are sleeping, or are becoming awake. This is also why *Caring for Our Children* describes a safe sleep environment as one that includes a safety-approved crib,

firm mattress, firmly fitted sheet, and the infant placed on their back at all times, in comfortable, safe garments, but nothing else – not even a blanket.

When infants are being dropped off, staff may be busy. Requiring parents/guardians to remove the infant from the car seat and reposition them in the supine position in their crib (if they are sleeping), will reinforce safe sleep practices and reassure parents/guardians that their child is in a safe position before they leave the facility.

Challenges: National recommendations for reducing the risk of SUIDs are provided for use in the general population. Most research reviewed to guide the development of these recommendations was not conducted in child care settings. Because infants are at increased risk for dying from sleep-related causes in child care (4,5), caregivers/teachers must provide the safest sleep environment for the infants in their care.

When hospital staff or parents/guardians of infants who may attend child care place the infant in a position other than supine for sleep, the infant becomes accustomed to this and can have a more difficult time adjusting to child care, especially when they are placed for sleep in a new unfamiliar position.

Parents/guardians and caregivers/teachers want infants to transition to child care facilities in a comfortable and easy manner. It can be challenging for infants to fall asleep in a new environment because there are different people, equipment, lighting, noises, etc. When infants sleep well in child care, adults feel better. Placing personal items in cribs with infants and covering or wrapping infants with blankets may help the adults to believe that the child is more comfortable or feels comforted. However, this may or may not be true. These practices are not the safest practices for infants in child care, and they should not be allowed. Efforts to educate the public about the risk of sleep-related deaths promoting the use of consistent safe sleep practices need to continue.

Special Care Plans: Some facilities require staff to place infants in a supine position for sleep unless there is documentation in a child's special care plan indicating a medical need for a different position. This can provide the caregiver/teacher with more confidence in implementing the safe sleep policy and refusing parental demands that are not consistent with safe sleep practices. It is likely that an infant will be unaccustomed to sleeping supine if his or her parents/guardians object to the supine position (and are therefore placing the infant prone to sleep at home). By providing educational information on the importance of consistent use of safe sleep policies and practices to expectant parents, facilities will help raise awareness of these issues, promote infant safety, and increase support for proper implementation of safe sleep policies and practices in the future.

Use of Pacifiers: Caregivers/teachers should be aware of the current recommendation of the AAP about pacifier use to reduce the risk of SUIDs (2). While using pacifiers to reduce the risk of SIDS seems prudent (especially if the infant is already sleeping with a pacifier at home), pacifier use has also been shown to be associated with an increased risk of ear infections. Keeping pacifiers clean and limiting their use to sleep time is best. Using pacifiers in a sanitary and safe fashion in group care settings requires special diligence.

Pacifiers should be inspected for tears before use. Pacifiers should not be clipped to an infant's clothing or tied around an infant's neck.

For children in the general population, the AAP recommends the following:

- a. Child care facilities require written permission from the child's parent/guardian for pacifier use;
- b. Consider offering a pacifier when placing the infant down for nap and sleep time;
- c. If the infant refuses the pacifier, s/he should not be forced to take it;
- d. If the infant falls asleep and the pacifier falls out of the infant's mouth, it should be removed from the crib and does not need to be reinserted. A pacifier has been shown to reduce the risk of SIDS, even if the pacifier falls out during sleep (2);
- e. Pacifiers should not be coated in any sweet solution, and they should be cleaned and replaced regularly; and
- f. For breastfed infants, delay pacifier introduction until fifteen days of age to ensure that breastfeeding is well-established (2).

Swaddling: Hospital personnel or physicians, particularly those who work in neonatal intensive care units or infant nurseries in hospitals may recommend that newborns be swaddled in the hospital setting. Although parents/guardians may choose to continue this practice at home, swaddling infants when they are being placed to sleep or are sleeping in a child care facility is not necessary or recommended. See [Standard 3.1.4.2](#) for more detailed information.

Concern about Plagiocephaly: If parents/guardians or caregivers/teachers are concerned about positional plagiocephaly (flat head or flat spot on head), they can continue to use safe sleep practices but also do the following:

- a. Offer infants opportunities to be held upright and participate in supervised "tummy time" when they are awake;
- b. Alter the position of the infant, and thereby alter the supine position of the infant's head and face. This can easily be accomplished by alternating the placement of the infant in the crib – place the infant to sleep with their head facing to one side for a week and then turning the infant so that their head and face are placed the other way. Infants typically turn their

head to one side toward the room or door, so if they are placed with their head toward one side of the bed for one sleep time and then placed with their head toward the other side of the bed the next time, this changes the area of the head that is in contact with the mattress.

A common question among caregivers/teachers and parents/guardians is whether they should return the infant to the supine position if they roll onto their side or their tummies. Infants up to twelve months of age should be placed wholly supine for sleep every time. In fact, all children should be placed (or encouraged to lie down) on their backs to sleep. When infants are developmentally capable of rolling comfortably from their backs to their fronts and back again, there is no evidence to suggest that they should be re-positioned into the supine position.

The California Childcare Health Program has available a [Safe Sleep Policy for Infants in Child Care Programs](#). AAP provides a [free online course](#) on safe sleep practices.

## TYPE OF FACILITY

Center, Large Family Child Care Home

## RELATED STANDARDS

2.2.0.1 Methods of Supervision of Children

3.1.4.2 Swaddling

3.1.4.3 Pacifier Use

3.1.4.4 Scheduled Rest Periods and Sleep Arrangements

3.4.1.1 Use of Tobacco, Electronic Cigarettes, Alcohol, and Drugs

3.4.6.1 Strangulation Hazards

3.6.4.5 Death

4.3.1.1 General Plan for Feeding Infants

4.5.0.3 Activities that Are Incompatible with Eating

5.4.5.1 Sleeping Equipment and Supplies

5.4.5.2 Cribs

6.4.1.3 Crib Toys

9.2.3.15 Policies Prohibiting Smoking, Tobacco, Alcohol, Illegal Drugs, and Toxic Substances

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**NOTES**

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