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[Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development \(NICHD\)](http://www.nichd.nih.gov)

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NIH expands safe infant sleep outreach effort

'Safe to sleep' seeks to reduce risk of sleep-related infant death

A national campaign to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome has entered a new phase and will now encompass all sleep-related, sudden unexpected infant deaths, officials of the National Institutes of Health announced recently.

This campaign, formerly known as the Back to Sleep Campaign, has been renamed the *Safe to Sleep Campaign*.

The NIH-led Back to Sleep Campaign began in 1994, to educate parents, caregivers, and health care providers about ways to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). The campaign name was derived from the recommendation to place healthy infants on their backs to sleep, a practice proven to reduce SIDS risk. SIDS is the sudden death of an infant under 1 year of age that cannot be explained, even after a complete death scene investigation, autopsy, and review of the infant's health history. Sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) refers to those designated as SIDS, as well as sleep-related infant deaths with other cause of death designations.

Many SUID cases are classified as accidental suffocation and entrapment, which can happen when an infant gets trapped between a mattress and a wall, or when bedding material presses on or wraps around an infant's neck, or when the body of someone sharing the same sleep surface as the infant accidentally occludes the infant's airway during sleep. In other cases, medical examiners do not feel that there is enough evidence to make such a determination, and the cause of death will remain as undetermined on the death certificate.

In addition to stressing the placement of infants on their backs for all sleep times, the Safe to Sleep Campaign emphasizes other ways to provide a safe sleep environment for infants. This includes placing infants to sleep in their own safe sleep environment, not on an adult bed, and without any soft

bedding such as blankets or quilts. Eliminating such risks to infant health as overheating, exposure to tobacco smoke, and a mother's use of alcohol and illicit drugs, as well as breastfeeding when possible have also been associated with reducing the risk of SIDS. "In recent years, we've learned that many of the risk factors for SIDS are similar to those for other sleep-related causes of infant death," said Alan E. Guttmacher, M.D., Director of the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the NIH institute which sponsors Safe to Sleep. "Placing infants on their backs to sleep and providing them with a safe sleep environment for every sleep time reduces the risk for SIDS as well as death from other causes, such as suffocation."

A new one-page fact sheet, "What does a safe sleep environment look like," shows how to provide a safe sleep environment, and lists ways that parents and caregivers can reduce the risk of sleep-related infant death. The fact sheet is available at http://nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs_details.cfm?from=&pubs_id=5795.

The NICHD's new brochure, *Safe Sleep for Your Baby*, provides more detailed information on ways that parents and caregivers can reduce the risk of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death. The *Safe Sleep for Your Baby* brochure, as well as the one-page fact sheet, are available for order at 1-800-505-CRIB (2742) or at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/SIDS>.

In the next month, new Safe to Sleep materials will be available in Spanish as well as materials targeted toward the African-American and American Indian/Alaska Native communities, which experience higher rates of SUID. A *Safe Sleep for Your Baby* DVD will be available for order and the new Safe to Sleep campaign website will be launched in the coming days.

Since the 1970s, the NICHD has conducted and supported research to understand SIDS and identify ways to reduce its occurrence. The original Back to Sleep Campaign was based on the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) original recommendation for back sleeping. The new Safe to Sleep Campaign seeks to inform parents and caregivers of the AAP's [revised recommendations](#) for reducing SIDS as well as other causes of sleep-related infant death.

The NICHD has also enlisted the aid of spokespersons around the country for its Safe to Sleep Champions Initiative. Safe to Sleep Champions include infant and family health advocates, community leaders, and pediatricians. They will work with media in their areas to draw attention to the problem of SUID. NICHD Safe to Sleep Champions will target outreach in areas with higher rates of SIDS and other sleep-related causes of infant death: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, and Wyoming.

The original co-sponsors of the Back to Sleep Campaign, AAP, the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), First Candle, and the Association of SIDS and Infant Mortality Programs (ASIP) are the NICHD's collaborators on the Safe to Sleep Campaign. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Reproductive Health, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and Michigan Public Health Institute, Center for Child and Family Health (MPHI-CCFH) have joined as collaborators to support the campaign's efforts.

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About the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD): The NICHD sponsors research on development, before and after birth; maternal, child, and family health; reproductive biology and population issues; and medical rehabilitation. For more information, visit the Institute's website at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/>.

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit <http://www.nih.gov>.

About Michigan Public Health Institute, Center for Child and Family Health (MPHI-CCFH): Michigan Public Health Institute is a non-profit institute dedicated to improving community health through collaboration. MPHI's clients reap the benefits of these partnerships in the form of innovative community-based solutions for complex health system issues and research needs. MPHI has multiple areas of expertise that address the issues that surround maternal, child and adolescent health. For more information about MPHI and its programs, visit <http://www.mphi.org>.