**Safe Sleep for your Baby – Reduce the Risk of Cot Death**

**Key Points:**
- Always place your baby on their back to sleep.
- Don’t smoke during pregnancy and don’t smoke or allow anyone to smoke in the home or in the car.
- The safest place for your baby to sleep at night is in a cot in your room.
- Place baby with their feet to the foot of the cot.
- Make sure the baby’s head stays uncovered when asleep.
- Don’t let your baby get too hot.
- Keep the cot free of soft objects and anything loose or fluffy.
- Don’t fall asleep in bed with your baby if you or your partner smoke or have taken alcohol, drugs or medication that makes you sleep more heavily.
- Don’t fall asleep in bed with your baby if they are less than three months old, were born prematurely or had a low birth weight (less than 2.5kg or 5.5lbs at birth).
- Breastfeed your baby, if possible.
- Never fall asleep with your baby on a sofa or an armchair.
- If your baby seems unwell get medical advice early and quickly.

**Back to sleep - always place your baby on their back to sleep:**
- Babies who sleep on their tummies have a higher risk of cot death so always place baby to sleep on their back. This does not increase the risk of choking or vomiting.
- When baby is older and able to roll from back to front and back again, let them find their own position to sleep. You should still place them on their back at the start of sleep time.
- It is not safe to place your baby on their side to sleep because they may roll onto their tummy.
- If your baby always lies with their head in the same position they might develop a ‘flat-head’. This is known as plagiocephaly and you can stop this happening by changing the position of your baby’s head each time you put them down to sleep.
- When you put your baby down to sleep, position their head first (either to the right or the left) so that your baby’s cheek and ear rests on the mattress, then gently allow your baby’s body to roll completely onto their back. The next time you put them down to sleep place your baby’s head facing the other way. If you prefer your baby to face towards you when they are sleeping, you can alternate which end of the cot you place your baby.

**Feet to foot - place your baby with their feet to the foot of the cot and keep their face uncovered:**
- To stop your baby wriggling down under the covers, place them to sleep with their feet to the foot of the cot, basket or pram and have the covers below their shoulders.
- Tuck covers in loosely but securely and make sure they cannot slip over the baby’s head. Check regularly to make sure baby’s head stays uncovered. If the bedding slips over their head while they are asleep, they are at increased risk of cot death.
- Keep the cot free of soft objects and anything loose or fluffy (bedding, toys, bumpers, pillows, duvets, sleep positioners, wedges or bedding rolls).
- Use a clean, firm mattress that fits the cot correctly so your baby can’t get trapped in a gap between the mattress and the edge of the cot. The mattress should be in very good condition (no tears) and have a removable, washable cover.
- Remember… face up, face free for a safe sleep.

**Don’t let your baby get too hot (or too cold):**
- Overheating can increase your baby’s risk of cot death - a baby can overheat when asleep because of too much bedding or clothes or because the room is too hot.
- To check how warm your baby is, feel their tummy – it should feel warm but not hot. If their tummy feels hot or if they are sweating anywhere your baby is too warm, so remove some of the bedding.
- Other signs include flushed, red cheeks and fast breathing. Don’t worry if your baby’s hands and feet feel cool – this is normal.
- Do not overdress your baby – a nappy, vest and babygro are enough. They can wear less in warm weather.
- Remember to take off baby’s hat and extra clothes as soon as you are indoors.
- Make sure the room your baby sleeps in is not too warm. The room temperature should range from 16 - 20°C (62 - 68°F). If the room feels too warm for you it is too warm for your baby. Consider buying a room thermometer.
- Never place the cot, pram or bed next to a radiator, heater or fire or in direct sunshine.
- Do not use too many blankets – sheets and light blankets or cellular blankets are best as you can adjust the temperature by adding a blanket or taking one away. Cellular blankets have small holes in them so keep your baby warm without overheating. Do not use duvets, quilts or pillows.
- In warm weather your baby may not need any bed covers at all. Remember, a blanket folded in half is 2 layers.
- Make sure the bedding can’t cover your baby’s head. Babies lose heat through their head so covering their head may cause your baby to become overheated.
- You can use a sleeveless baby grobag instead of blankets, as it will not cover the head if you use it properly. It should fit correctly around the neck so that your baby’s head cannot slip down inside the bag. It must be light, with no hood. Do not use any other bedding with it. The grobag should be the right size for your baby with enough room for them to move their legs and feet. The grobag should also meet the relevant safety standard.
- Remember… Overheating can increase your baby’s risk of cot death.
The safest place for your baby to sleep at night is in a cot in your room:

- Babies who sleep in a cot in their parents’ bedroom are less at risk of cot death than if they are on their own in a separate room. Keep your baby’s cot in your room for the first six months.
- A separate cot is safest. Bed-sharing can be dangerous.
- Do not share a bed with your baby if you or your partner smoke (no matter where you smoke - even if you never smoke in bed), have taken alcohol, drugs or medication that may make you sleep more heavily or are extremely tired.
- Do not share a bed with your baby if your baby is less than three months old, was born prematurely (born before 37 weeks) or had a low birth weight (less than 2.5kg or 5.5lbs when born).
- Babies who share their parents’ bed can slip under the bed covers, they can roll under an adult, get caught between the bed and the wall or fall out of the bed. Remember, your baby should not share a bed with your other children. **Never fall asleep with your baby on a sofa, couch, armchair or beanbag** – this is very dangerous.

Breastfeeding:

- Breastfeeding your baby reduces the risk of cot death. Aim to breastfeed your baby for as long as you can.
- Some mothers like to bring their babies into bed to breastfeed. But pay careful attention to the guidelines on safe sleep in this leaflet and remember - it’s safe to feed your baby in bed as long as you put them back in their own cot to sleep.

Soothers:

- Some research suggests that giving a baby a soother (dummy) every time they are being placed to sleep may reduce the risk of cot death. However, if you are breastfeeding and you choose to give your baby a soother, wait until after one month of age to make sure breastfeeding is well established.
- Don’t worry if the soother falls out while your baby is asleep and do not force your baby to take a soother if they refuse it.
- Do not attach strings and cords to soothers, as these could strangle your baby or cause them to choke. Keep soothers clean and never dip them in sugar, honey or other foods and drinks.

Tummy Time:

- When your baby is awake, let them spend some time on their tummy and sitting up, while you supervise. This helps your baby to exercise and strengthen muscles in the neck, arms and shoulders, helps the brain develop and it stops the back of the head getting flat.
- Make sure your baby is awake and is never left alone on their tummy and if your baby falls asleep when on their tummy, be sure to place them onto their back.
- Always place your baby on a firm, flat surface. Avoid beanbags or very padded furniture.
- It is important to begin tummy time from birth – baby should have tummy time about 3 times a day for 3-5 minutes at a time. This should slowly build up to longer sessions. **Remember on their back to sleep, on their front to play.**

Smoke free zone for your baby:

If you cut out smoking when you’re pregnant and keep your baby away from cigarette smoke after birth, you can greatly reduce the risk of cot death:

- Smoking during pregnancy increases your baby’s risk of cot death - if you smoke during pregnancy your baby is more likely to be born prematurely or have low birth weight and these babies have a higher risk of cot death.
- Your baby’s risk goes up with every cigarette you smoke a day and with every smoker in your home. So if you and your partner both smoke, your baby’s risk is higher than if only one of you smokes.
- Do not smoke or allow anyone to smoke in the home or car - being exposed to cigarette smoke after birth also increases a baby’s risk of cot death.
- It is most important that no one smokes around baby & when you go out, don’t bring your baby into smoky places. **For advice & support on quitting smoking, phone the National Smokers’ Quitline on Callsave 1850 201 203 or [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie)**

If your baby seems unwell, get medical advice early and quickly:

- Dial 999 or 112 for an ambulance if your baby is not responding to you, stops breathing or turns blue, cannot be woken or has a fit.
- Call the doctor if your baby is drinking less than half their normal amount of milk. Babies and young children often have minor illnesses which you should not be too worried about. If you find it hard to tell whether an illness is more serious, call your doctor for advice.
- Apnoea or breathing monitors cannot prevent cot death. They alert parents/carers to apnoea (stopped breathing) or an apparent life-threatening event.

What is cot death?

- Cot death, or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), is the sudden and unexpected death of a seemingly healthy baby. It is the most common cause of death in babies aged 4 weeks – 1 year. It is most common between 2 and 4 months of age (but can also happen to older babies). It is only diagnosed when all other possible causes of death are ruled out. Cot death does not only happen in cots, it may happen in a pram, bed, car seat or anywhere a baby is resting.
- Cot death is not caused by immunisations and is not caused by vomiting, choking or suffocation. While it is not preventable, you can reduce the risks by following the guidelines in this leaflet.

Cot death is still quite rare, so while it is important to take all the necessary precautions, do not let fear spoil precious times with your baby.

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**The information in this leaflet is for everyone who looks after a baby - please share it!**

To download further copies of this leaflet and other child safety material, visit [www.hse.ie/childsafety](http://www.hse.ie/childsafety)

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If you have any questions about the information here, please contact:

- National Paediatric Mortality Register (NPRM) at 01-878 8455 - [www.sidsireland.ie](http://www.sidsireland.ie) - email npmr@cuh.ie - helpline 1850 391 391 - or
- The Irish Sudden Infant Death Association at 01 - 873 2711 - [www.isida.ie](http://www.isida.ie)

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