

House Call *for* Healthy Kids

Does Your Baby Sleep Safely?



We all should cuddle with our babies and want them to feel loved.

Many special moments with babies come at bedtime. Some parents or care providers sleep with a baby on a bed, chair or couch because it is convenient. Some may feel they have no other choice at the time. Lying down with a baby encourages breast-feeding and increases bonding with a baby. However, when a parent or any other person falls asleep with a baby, his/her body may cause tragic harm.

Babies need to sleep on firm mattresses and without anything, such as soft bedding or stuffed animals. These items could trap or suffocate the child. When an infant or child sleeps with any sleeping person in a bed, chair, couch, or anywhere that is not safe for a baby, it is known as “unsafe sleeping.” This also could be called: “bed sharing,” “co-sleeping,” or “the family bed.” Unsafe sleeping is dangerous because babies can be smothered and suffocate if they:

- Are rolled on top of by a sleeping adult or other child
- Slip down under the bedding or into the pillows

- Become trapped between the bed and the wall, between cushions on a couch, or against parts or a person’s body

According to the Marion County Child Fatality Review Team, unsafe sleeping conditions contributed to the deaths of 57 infants from Marion County from 1996-1999. In 1998, more infants died in Marion County from unsafe sleeping than from not being protected in a child car safety seat! In 2000, 11 infant deaths in Marion County were directly due to unsafe sleeping arrangements.

Chaired by Dr. Roberta Hibbard, an Indiana University School of Medicine Professor or Pediatrics, the Marion County Child Fatality Review Team involves several community partners, including Riley Hospital staff, who regularly review child deaths. In response to the number of infant deaths reported due to unsafe sleeping conditions, the team recently produced a pamphlet about safe sleeping practices for infants. Parents and care providers are advised to:

- Put your baby to sleep on his back in his own crib
- Use a crib that is sturdy and well maintained
- Use a firm crib mattress that fits the crib tightly
- Have a tight-fitting crib sheet
- Keep crib bedding simple – avoid extra blankets, any pillows and bumper pads
- Use a baby monitor to help you hear your baby
- Move the baby’s crib or bassinet into your room if you want to be close to him
- Do not leave our baby asleep and unattended in a car safety seat

If you know someone in need of a crib or a portable crib for a baby or someone who may have other baby needs, the Indiana State Department of Health’s Indiana Family Helpline at 1-800-433-0746 may be able to help you.

For a copy of the brochure, “Do You Know the Dangers of Sleeping With Your Baby?,” contact Riley Hospital’s Community Education Department at 317-274-2964 or visit Healthy Habits at www.rileyforkids.org