

Safer Sleep for Babies is everyone's business

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Background

Each year around 200 babies in the UK sadly die unexpectedly before their first birthday. Many of these deaths are classified as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or cot death, which usually happens when babies are sleeping. The work to promote safer sleep for babies arose after studies found that baby deaths might have been prevented if parents had known about safer sleeping.

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Why it matters?

In Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, 5-6 babies sadly die every year where unsafe sleep is a factor. Although rates have declined nationally and locally since the 1990's, SIDS rates are still higher than they need to be. Child Death Overview Panels continue to report that the majority of sudden infant deaths occur with known, modifiable risk factors. This means that many unexpected baby deaths could be avoided.

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What causes Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?

It's not known what causes SIDS. For many babies, it's likely that there are a number of factors involved during the early months while they are most vulnerable. Even though the exact cause is unknown, there are some factors that can put babies at a greater risk.

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What are the risk factors?

Known high level risks include sleeping with a baby on a chair or sofa. Co sleeping when risk factors are present also increases the risk of SIDS. It is dangerous for parents or carers to co sleep with a baby if they are smokers, have drunk alcohol or have taken drugs or medication causing deeper sleep. Co sleeping when a baby is premature (born before 37 weeks), or had a low birth weight (less than 2.5kg or 5.5lb) is also an increased risk factor.



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Where can I find more information?

For more information and resources to support professionals/practitioners promote Safer Sleep messages, visit the Safer Sleep page on The Lullaby Trust website: [Safer sleep overview | The Lullaby Trust](#)

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What can I do?

Anyone coming into contact with families with young babies can make a difference by having conversations about safer sleep. Health professionals are key, but others including housing, social care, community/voluntary and emergency services can all make a difference by helping to identify the risks and promoting safer sleep advice. Use your 'professional curiosity' to help challenge assumptions, understand people's lived experience, identify risks and discuss strengths based solutions.

[professionalcuriosity.pdf](#)

[7-minute-briefing-on-professional-curiosity-final-pdf.pdf](#)

[All-age professional curiosity rapid read practitioner briefing - NHS Safeguarding](#)

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What can be done to reduce the risks?

The safest place for a baby to sleep for the first 6 months is in their own clear, flat, firm, separate sleep space (such as cot or Moses basket) in the same room as their parents or carers and following Safer Sleep guidelines. However, it is recognised that some parents choose to cosleep with their baby. It is important that professionals and practitioners do not judge parents for co-sleeping in order to maintain good communication, highlight any risks and help parents make informed choices on where and how their baby sleeps.