



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH urges parents to create a safe sleep environment for babies

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Unsafe sleeping practices put infants at increased risk for injury or death. More than half of the 61 infant deaths in Alabama due to "threats to breathing" between 2000 and 2004 were directly associated with hazardous sleeping environments. These include allowing a baby to co-sleep with an adult or sibling and putting a baby to sleep on a sofa or adult-size bed.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said. "Parents must become aware of the hazards of allowing an infant to co-sleep or to sleep in an unsafe environment if babies are to remain healthy and safe."

A Center for Health Statistics report of the years 2000 through 2004, found that 72.8 percent of the bed-related infant deaths were attributed to suffocation due to overlaying. "Asphyxiation by overlay" occurs when an individual is sharing a bed or couch with an infant and, while sleeping, accidentally rolls onto the infant and smothers the baby.

Data from a survey of Alabama mothers of newborn infants called PRAMS (Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System) show that one-third of mothers "always" or "almost always" allow their infant to sleep with themselves or someone else. The survey also shows this practice has increased over the past eight years.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development reported that babies laid in an adult bed were "20 times more likely to suffocate than infants who sleep alone in cribs."

Bedding hazards identified by this study are as follows:

- Overlaying or rolling onto the infant by another individual sharing the same bed
- Entrapment between a bed and wall, or between the bed and some other object
- Entrapment involving headboards, footboards or the bed frame

- Soft or fluffy bedding hazards (such as pillows, thick blankets, comforters that could hinder a child's breathing).
- Falls (sometimes into a pile of clothing or onto plastic, resulting in suffocation).

These issues are major concerns of the Alabama Child Death Review System, which has discovered there are several reasons why infants die while asleep, including a lack of safe cribs in low-income families. To address this problem, Alabama's *Cribs for Kids* program provides safe sleeping habit education and vouchers for cribs to eligible families in Montgomery County and hopes to start pilot programs in other counties with the support of local funding sources.

"Our ultimate goal is to reduce the numbers of bed-sharing deaths in the state," said Bob Hinds, ACDRS director. "But, even if we save just one baby, all the money and all the training we are providing will be very well worth it."

The ACDRS has developed an educational brochure, "Safety for Sleeping Babies," which gives useful guidance on all these issues. Brochures, which have been distributed at delivery hospitals statewide, are available in English and in Spanish by contacting the ACDRS via its Web site at www.adph.org/cdr.

Also, to help address these senseless deaths, the Alabama State Perinatal Program of the Alabama Department of Public Health offers counseling training statewide about safe infant sleep practices to family physicians, pediatricians and their office staffs.

To keep Alabama babies safe while sleeping, parents must not allow an infant to sleep in an adult-size bed or lay an infant on a couch or chair to sleep. The safest location for infant sleeping is alone, in a crib which conforms to Consumer Product Safety Commission standards, which contains no extra bedding or toys, and which is located near the parents' bed.

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