Reducing the Risk of SIDS in Child Care Centers

What is SIDS?
Did you know that Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the leading cause of death in infants less than one year of age? SIDS is defined as the sudden and unexplained death that occurs most often in healthy, sleeping infants less than one year of age. Over 4,500 infants die every year due to sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) with half due to SIDS. Approximately 20% of all SIDS deaths occur in child care centers or child care homes.

Why does SIDS happen?
The specific cause of SIDS is unknown. Experts believe 80-90% of SUID is caused by unsafe sleeping practices. Often parents and child care providers are hesitant to put infants to sleep on their backs because they are concerned about infants choking if they spit up while sleeping; this does not occur with most infants. Certain risk factors may increase an infant’s chance of dying of SIDS, but they are not the cause.

What can I do to help reduce the risk of SIDS at my child care center?
Below are some helpful tips that may help reduce an infant’s risk of SIDS.

- Always put infants on their back to sleep.
  - Unless the infant has a signed note from a health care provider which discusses the position the infant should be put to sleep and the medical reason for this position.
- If the infant is able to roll over on their own it is alright to leave the infant in the position he/she likes to sleep in. Be sure to lay the infant down on his/her back at first.
- Do not smoke around the infants in your care.
- Dress infant in light clothes (no layers). Make sure that the infant’s clothes are not more than what you would wear.
- Keep sleep area at a temperature that would be comfortable to you while in light clothing.
- Sleeping infants should be visually checked on every 15-20 minutes; do not rely on monitors only.
- Infant should sleep on a firm mattress covered with a fitted sheet in a crib which meets Consumer Product Safety Crib Standards without pillows, toys, bumpers, or soft bedding.
Do not allow infant to sleep on soft surfaces such as adult beds, sofas, chairs and blankets. If a light blanket is needed, place the infant’s feet at the foot of the bed and tuck the blanket in on all sides and underneath the arms of the infant. The blanket should not come higher than the infant’s chest.

If parents wish to have their infant put down to sleep with a pacifier, there have been studies which show this may be beneficial.

- Pacifiers should be used when placing the infant down for sleep, but not reinserted once the infant falls asleep.
- Infants should not be forced to take a pacifier.
- For the breastfed infant, pacifier use should be started around the age of 1 month to make sure that breastfeeding has been firmly established.

Create a safe sleep policy in your child care center. Discuss the importance of putting infants on their back to sleep with your co-workers and families.

Support your parents who want to breastfeed or feed their infant’s breastmilk.

Breastfeeding and SIDS
There may be a link between breastfeeding and lowering an infant’s risk of SIDS. There have been studies done that show infants who were breastfed were 2 to 3 times more likely to not die of SIDS than infants that have never been breastfed. Some possible reasons why breastfeeding may decrease the risk of SIDS include:

- Breastfed infants are generally healthier.
- Breastmilk is easier to digest than formula so the infant may wake more often at night to feed.
- Breastmilk may speed up the development of the infant’s brain and spinal cord, which regulates body activities such as beating of the heart and breathing.
- Breastmilk has antibacterial properties and may protect against illnesses that place infants at a higher risk for SIDS.

Tummy Time
Tummy time is important for the infant to have both at home and while in child care. Tummy time is when the infant is placed on his/her stomach while he/she is awake. It is important that tummy time be supervised. Tummy time helps infants develop strong neck, shoulder and back muscles, improve motor skills and reduces head flattening.

For more resources on SIDS, please visit the Safe to Sleep website at http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sts/Pages/default.aspx.