



Public Safety Bulletin Infant Deaths Linked to unsafe Sleep Practices

For Immediate release
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Nunavut Coroner Service

The infant death rate in Nunavut is 14.6 deaths per 1000 live births, which is three times higher than the Canadian average of (5.2 deaths per 1000 live births). Unsafe sleep practices are known to increase risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), which is a leading cause of infant deaths in Nunavut.

As a result of a joint review of infant deaths, the Nunavut Coroner Service, Department of Health, Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc, would like to remind parents and caregivers of the steps they can take to ensure children are in a safe sleeping environment.

Recommendations for ensuring infants are in a safe sleeping environment:

- 1. Sleeping Position:** Research has shown that the safest sleeping position for an infant in the first year of life is to sleep on their back for every sleep, without any blankets or toys in a crib, bassinet, or protected sleeping area. For parents and caregivers who share a bed with their baby, it is still important that the baby be placed on their back to sleep. All around the world, the “back-to sleep” campaigns has been successful in reducing crib deaths.
- 2. Sleeping surface:** The sleeping area should be free of loose bed sheets, heavy blankets, pillows, soft material, and crib bumper pads, which can increase the risk of suffocation. Water beds, couches/sofas and air mattresses are not safe for babies to sleep on. Being too cold or being too hot or too bundled up during sleep can also increase risk of crib deaths. Car seats and infant carriers should not replace the crib as a place where the baby sleeps.
- 3. Bed sharing while impaired:** Sharing a bed with an infant, if the mother is extremely tired, sedated with prescriptions or non-prescription medications, or



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under the influence of drugs or alcohol can carry an increased risk of death for babies less than one year of age.

4. **Non-caregiver:** Babies who share a bed with someone who is not the primary person responsible for the infants care are at increased risk of sudden death of babies. If there is bed sharing, it should only be with a primary caregiver and never with non-caregiver or children.

5. **Tobacco use in pregnancy and around babies:** Babies should always be in a smoke-free environment. Babies who are exposed to cigarette smoke during pregnancy and who live in homes with smokers are at increased risk of SIDS. It is important as a community to support pregnant women and their partner to quit smoking and help is available at Health Centers. It is important for everyone in our communities to remember not to smoke around babies and children.

As a community, we can work together to reduce the number of infant deaths in Nunavut.

Padma Suramala
Chief Coroner of Nunavut