

What is Sudden Infant Death Syndrome?

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome — commonly referred to as SIDS — is an unforeseen, sudden passing of an infant under the age of one, in which an autopsy is not able to determine any explainable origin of death.

Rates of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome have decreased a great deal since 1992, when caregivers were first instructed lay infants on their backs or sides for sleeping to lessen the possibility of SIDS. Sadly, however, it still remains a significant reason for death in babies under one year old. Thousands of infants die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in the United States every year.

The cause of SIDS is still not known, but there have been numerous hypotheses. Many researchers and physicians believe that Sudden Infant Death Syndrome not a caused by one condition, but more than likely, numerous factors put together. These issues may include difficulties with sleep awakening or a failure to sense a gathering of carbon dioxide in the baby's blood. Most SIDS deaths happen without any notice or symptoms when the child is believed to be sleeping.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is most commonly occurs between two and four months of age and 90% happen by six months of age. It is more prevalent in the winter months with the highest number of occurrences happening in January. Native and African American babies have also shown a higher rate of SIDS deaths.

The following are possible causes that have been linked to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome:

- Putting babies to sleep on their bellies
- Babies who are exposed to cigarette smoke — both before and after birth
- Infants who share a bed with an adult
- Soft bedding in the baby's crib
- Babies born of multiple births — such as a twin, triplet, etc.
- Premature babies
- Infants that had a sibling die of SIDS
- Babies born of teenage mothers
- Babies born very close in age to another sibling
- No prenatal care or care that took place too late
- Poverty stricken environment for the baby

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome has also been known to affect more boys than girls. Although research shows that infants who fall into one or more of the above risk factors are more probable to be affected, the influence or significance of each factor is still not well understood.

There are many support groups that offer help to grieving parents and caregivers who have lost a baby to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome because of the guilt one feels over never knowing the cause of what happened. Individual and family counseling is always encouraged for parents, siblings, and any other family member who has been affected by the loss of a child due to SIDS.

If you happen to be the parent or caregiver of a baby who is under one year of age, it is always recommended that you be trained in CPR and also call 911 immediately if your infant is not breathing or moving. This prepares oneself for an emergency situation and better equips the caregiver with the fundamentals needed to possibly save a baby's life.