

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

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Original

Article: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/suddeninfantdeathsyndrome.html>

Definition

- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the unexplained death, usually during sleep, of a seemingly healthy baby.

Definition

- Most SIDS deaths occur in children between 2 months and 4 months of age. Sudden infant death syndrome rarely occurs before 1 month of age or after 6 months.

Causes

- **Brain and nerve characteristics:** .
Infants who die of SIDS may have brainstems that mature more slowly than those of other infants. Myelin, a fatty substance involved in nerve signal transmission, also may develop more slowly in infants with SIDS.

Causes

Breathing. Other research has focused on the way babies breathe while they're asleep — especially their response to low blood oxygen levels (hypoxia).

Causes

- **Heart function.** Researchers continue to investigate the link between SIDS and long QT syndrome, a subtle electrical disturbance in the heart that causes sudden, extremely rapid heart rates

Causes

Immunizations. After reviewing the available evidence, the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that childhood immunizations don't play a role in sudden infant death syndrome.

Risk factors

- **Male.** Boy babies are more likely to die of SIDS.
- **Between 1 month and 6 months of age.** Infants are most vulnerable during the second and third months of life.

Risk factors

- **Premature or of low birth weight.** Your baby is more susceptible to SIDS if he or she was premature or had a low birth weight.
- **Black, American Indian or Native Alaskan.** For reasons that aren't well understood, there appears to be an association between race and the risk of SIDS.

Risk factors

- **Placed to sleep on their stomachs**
- Babies who sleep on their stomachs are much more likely to die of SIDS than are babies who sleep on their backs
- Side sleeping — because infants placed on their sides are likely to roll to their stomachs — and soft bedding have also been found to contribute to risk.

Risk factors

Born to mothers who smoke or use drugs. Smoking cigarettes during or after your pregnancy puts your baby at considerably higher risk of SIDS. Using drugs such as cocaine, heroin or methadone while you're pregnant also increases the risk.

Risk factors

Exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. Infants exposed to secondhand smoke have a higher risk of SIDS.

Born during the fall or winter months. More SIDS cases occur when the weather is cooler.

Risk factors

- **Overheated.** Some evidence suggests that babies who are overdressed, covered with multiple blankets or whose rooms are too warm are at greater risk of SIDS, especially if they're put to sleep on their stomachs

Risk factors

Recently recovered from an upper respiratory infection. Evidence of infection within four weeks of death is a common finding in SIDS autopsies.

Risk factors

- Also at risk are babies whose mothers had:
- Inadequate prenatal care
- Placental abnormalities — such as placenta previa, a condition where the placenta lies low in the uterus, sometimes covering the opening of the cervix
- Low weight gain during pregnancy
- Their first pregnancy at younger than 20 years of age
- Anemia
- History of sexually transmitted diseases or urinary tract infections

Prevention

- There's no guaranteed way to prevent SIDS, but you can help your baby sleep safely. Recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics include the following:

Prevention

- **Put your baby to sleep on his or her back**
- **Be sure your baby is placed to sleep on his or her back when in the care of others.**
- **Don't smoke**
- **Select bedding carefully.**

Prevention

- **Place your baby to sleep in a crib or bassinet — not in your bed**
- **Keep your baby nearby.**
- **Consider breast-feeding**
- **Moderate room temperature.**