

CHILD SAFETY BLOG

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Stripping Down the Crib to Cut the Risk of Sudden Infant Death

By **Patrick A. Malone**

October 27, 2011

When it comes to babies and sleep, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has made it official: Less is more.

Its new **guidelines** call for cribs empty of everything except the baby and the tightly sheeted mattress. No blankets. No bumpers, pillows or toys. They're all hazardous for babies because they present a risk of suffocation, entrapment and asphyxia.

In a report for **NPR**, pediatrician Rachel Moon, chairwoman of the AAP Task Force on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), said, "Babies can roll into [anything] soft and suffocate against it, and babies can crawl under it and suffocate. Even the hard bumper pads are a problem because babies can scoot in and get their head wedged in between the mattress and the bumper pad and can't get out."

In the last two decades, the incidence of SIDS has fallen dramatically, thanks to the academy's evolving understanding of the syndrome. All parents now are schooled in the "Back to Sleep" idea: Put your baby to sleep on her back, not her stomach; the admonition to keep cribs clear is another effort to address SIDS, which still causes about 2,300 babies to die every year in the U.S.

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Some products claim they can help prevent SIDS, but that's bogus. In fact, the FDA has issued a [consumer alert](#) about such claims.

The only proven methods to reduce the chances of SIDS are proper sleeping posture and clear cribs. In addition, the academy recommends that cribs be located in the parents' room -- but babies should not sleep in the same bed -- and that babies be breast fed and immunized to prevent infant death. The latter two help prevent infection, which often precedes an incident of SIDS.

Other habits pregnant women indulge that appear to increase the risks are smoking, drinking alcohol and taking illicit drugs.

Still, accidental suffocation may account for some SIDS casualties, and some babies are particularly vulnerable because their brains haven't fully matured and they don't wake up easily when faced with an obstacle.

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