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## The City of Milwaukee Health Department Stresses the Importance of Infant Safe Sleep Environments

*Increasing awareness of dangers of bed-sharing a top priority for the department*

The City of Milwaukee Health Department held a press conference today, Tuesday, March 10, 2009 to share important tips on the do's and don'ts regarding infant safe sleep and also provided a live demonstration of how and where to place an infant safely to sleep.

The leading cause of infant mortality in the U.S. is primarily due to complications of prematurity. The second leading cause is SIDS and co-sleeping. In Milwaukee the infant mortality rate is 9.8 as compared to 6.7 nationally. What is even more alarming is the disparity of deaths between White and African-American babies. Infants born in the City of Milwaukee are approximately twice as likely to die of complications resulting from prematurity and three times more likely to die from SIDS and entrapments.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department is very clear in its official position regarding infant safe sleep practices: It does not promote or advise parents to share a bed with an infant. This is based on the American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement (1995) on reducing the risk of SIDS:

- A separate but proximate sleeping environment is recommended, meaning: babies should share a room with their parents, but not a bed. The risk of SIDS is reduced when the infant sleeps in the same room as the mother.
- Never put a baby to sleep on a couch or a chair. A crib, bassinette or cradle that conforms to the safety standards is recommended.
- The only item in the crib should be a mattress, covered by a tight fitting sheet. No pillows, bumper pads, blankets or toys.
- Babies can wear a one-piece sleeper to keep them warm.
- Babies should be put 'Back to Sleep.' Babies who sleep on their back are safer.
- Infants should sleep in a room that is comfortable for the whole family. Your house should not be too warm.
- No one sharing a house with an infant or child should smoke.

*Think Health. Act Now!*

The American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force concluded that rates of co-bedding are increasing especially as we encourage breastfeeding. But the conclusion of the task force is that bed sharing, as practiced in the US and other Western countries is more hazardous than the infant sleeping on a separate sleep surface. It is recommended that infants not share a bed with adults. Infants may be brought into bed for nursing or comforting, but should be returned to their own safe space to sleep when the parent is ready to return to sleep. A baby should never be brought into a bed if the parent is excessively tired or using medications or substances that could impair his or her alertness.

In addition to working with our key community partners that include hospital systems, community organizations, Milwaukee Fire Department and residents the MHD administers intensive home visiting programs aimed at improving healthy birth outcomes and reduce rates of infant mortality for high-risk families. Nurses work with pregnant women, fathers and infants to promote healthy pregnancies, better birth outcomes, and safe home environments for infants.

For more information on safe sleep, please contact your healthcare provider or visit the City of Milwaukee Health Department website at [www.milwaukee.gov/health](http://www.milwaukee.gov/health).

*Think Health. Act Now!*