



Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin

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Tips on How to Safely Co-Sleep with an Infant

Co-sleeping with infants is a reality for many, although the practice is not promoted to be the safest sleeping arrangement for infants. This practice may not be stopped fully, but it can be made safer. Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin, Inc. (BHCW) offers the following co-sleeping safety tips. These tips were formatted as a result of BHCW holding focus groups with African American, Hmong, and Latino mothers and families to get feedback on their views of co-sleeping and other potential risks.

Some mothers have their infants sleep with them in the bed after the delivery and several months after. We found that many families co-sleep with their babies as a personal preference. Many families prefer co-sleeping because they believe it promotes maternal bonding, breastfeeding, and better response to the baby's cries and needs. Telling caregivers of infants to not co-sleep is not enough when many will do it anyway for their varying reasons, the caregivers must also be provided with proper education on how to co-sleep safely.

If families follow these steps, you are helping to prevent many risk factors for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and infant mortality (the death of an infant before he/she reaches their first birthday).



Steps toward safe co-sleeping:

- DON'T sleep with your baby on a sofa, couch, chair, or waterbed.
- Lay your infant on its back. The back to sleep position has been considered the best sleeping position for infants. If you lay the infant on its side, do not use anything to prop the infant up and be sure not to have any loose bedding, pillows, or stuffed animals around. The baby's arm, which is close to the bed, should be placed forward to stop him or her from rolling onto their stomach.
- If you are on medication that makes you drowsy, sleep hard, or are extremely tired, be sure to position yourself and your baby at a reasonable distance apart to help avoid the chance of mistakenly laying or smothering the infant.

- Be careful with the type of bedding or sleeping materials you use. Fluffy pillows, stuffed animals, plastics, and loose bedding can suffocate an infant and should not be used where babies sleep. Your baby should sleep on a firm flat surface which is covered by a tight fitted sheet.
- When breastfeeding while co-sleeping, be sure to monitor your baby's eating intervals.
- If you or your partner have been drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs, **DON'T HAVE YOUR BABY SLEEPING WITH YOU!!! PARENTS CAN FACE SERIOUS CRIMINAL CHARGES IF THEIR BABY DIES WHILE THEY ARE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL OR AN ILLEGAL SUBSTANCE.**
- Bed sharing should never be a practice with non-caregivers. Non-caregivers will not have the same maternal or paternal instinct that is important in keeping the baby out of danger during sleep. Children older than two years should not sleep with infants.



Other tips for safe sleeping:

- **DON'T SMOKE AROUND YOUR BABY.** Prenatal smoking and second-hand smoke affects the normal breathing of an infant and can cause respiratory failure. **DON'T** bed share if you are a smoker.
- **AVOID OVERHEATING YOUR BABY.** Your baby should be lightly clothed for sleep, and the bedroom temperature should be kept comfortable for a lightly clothed adult. Over bundling should be avoided, and the baby should not feel hot to the touch.