

# Addressing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other sleep-related injuries and deaths in Alberta

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## INTRODUCTION

- Sudden, unexpected death of apparently healthy infants in sleep-related circumstances is one of the leading causes of infant mortality.
- Although SIDS incidence in Canada and other developed countries has declined due to increased awareness of risk and protective factors, the problem persists.
- In 2009, Alberta Health Services (AHS) was mandated to launch a provincial strategy to address the number of unexplained infant sleep-related deaths in Alberta.

## PURPOSE

- To increase awareness of risk factors associated with SIDS and other sleep-related deaths to support consistent safe infant sleep (SIS) messages, practices and environments.
- To reduce the risk of SIDS and prevent other infant sleep-related injuries and death in Alberta.

## METHODS

A multi-sectoral, multidisciplinary provincial governance structure was established and developed:

- An AHS provincial policy
- Staff education resources
- Parent resources

An ongoing quality improvement process was established to ensure the program continues to meet the intended outcomes.

A comprehensive evaluation was also completed one year post policy implementation that employed an online survey with closed and open ended questions targeting HCPs who apply the SIS policy as part of their role. A snowball sampling technique was used where 160 HCPs responded to the survey. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the quantitative data and a content analysis was conducted on the qualitative data. In acute care, the results showed that ~ 71% of HCPs provided SIS information, including risks of SIDS, on discharge to parents. Reasons given were SIS not seen as a priority, perception of parent noncompliance, and lack of knowledge of risks.

As a result, the staff education module was revised to include additional evidence, and resources and strategies were either created or enhanced to address common questions and barriers.

## RESULTS

### Staff Education Module

The quality improvement process and evaluation findings led to substantial changes to the staff education module, a key support for implementation of the policy. Revisions included:

- Clearer evidence and rationale for key messages to support safe sleep environments across the continuum of care in AHS facilities, community and home settings.
- Rationale to support alignment of key messages with relevant clinical practices such as NICU practices and breastfeeding.
- Overview of the policy and resources to support implementation.
- Overview of health care professional's role in supporting safe sleep decisions, utilizing informed and shared decision-making models.
- Harm reduction messaging related to common questions and barriers including sleep surface sharing (bed sharing), playpens and travel, baby boxes and swaddling.



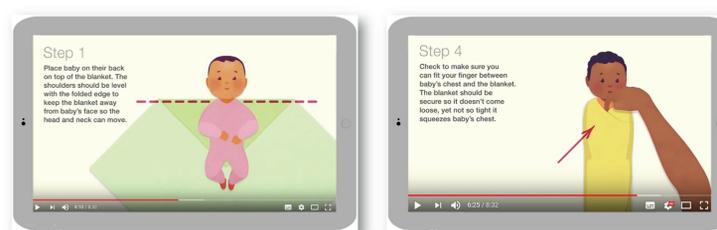
### Resources and Strategies

Through ongoing review and feedback cycles with provincial stakeholders, resources and strategies developed and updated included:

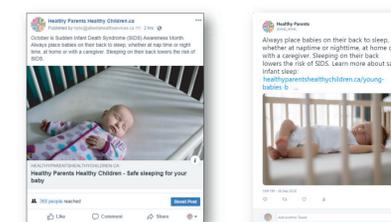
- Updated brochure and bookmark for health care professionals to give to parents.
- Updated safe infant sleep content of [HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca](http://HealthyParentsHealthyChildren.ca), the foundational resources for parenting in Alberta.



- Developed a swaddling video.



- Ongoing social media (Facebook and Twitter) presence.



## CONCLUSION

The ongoing quality improvement process and policy evaluation led to revisions of the staff education module and enhancements to resources and strategies to support policy implementation. These processes are an integral part of a health promotion project to ensure the deliverables continue to align with the needs of the target audiences.

Healthy literacy plays an essential role in supporting clinical practice and help-seeking behaviour. Parents and health care professionals are more likely to follow safe sleep recommendations if they understand the rationale behind them. To support continued uptake and development of a comprehensive knowledge translation plan is in progress.