

# Back to sleep

## Parents advised to provide safe sleeping environment to protect babies from SIDS

By Anne Kelly Record staff

When Sandra Good lays grand-daughter Sarah Montgomery down to sleep, she places the five-month-old on her back.

Things have changed since the Waterloo grandmother's two daughters were born more than 30 years ago.

Then, Good says, parents were advised to lay infants on their sides for the first few weeks, then on their tummies after that.

But Good wants to do whatever she can to protect Sarah from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), when she's babysitting for daughter Laurie and son-in-law Jim, also of Waterloo.

Each week, three babies die of SIDS in Canada. Research has found babies who sleep on their stomachs are much more likely to die of SIDS than babies who sleep on their backs.

The back position should be used every time; changing it just once dramatically increases an infant's risk of death, evidence has shown.

"That's why it is so important for caregivers to be aware," says Anne Arajas, acting manager of family and community resources with Waterloo Region Public Health.

Research is now showing that infant sleeping environments can also mean the difference between life and death. New recommendations continue to emerge to reduce risks.

Health officials want to ensure that anyone who might care for an infant, including members of extended families and babysitters, are aware of the latest advice.

"It's changing all the time," said an Levesque, a public health nurse in Waterloo Region who is spearheading push for increased awareness.

Levesque is a member of a new working group on infant sleeping practices formed by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. Its goal is to promote awareness among nurses and find ways to fund a marketing campaign aimed at all caregivers of babies under age one.

Levesque sometimes found a gen-



PHILIP HANKE/RECORD STAFF

Sarah Montgomery is in a safe sleeping position. Research shows babies who sleep on their stomachs are much more likely to die of SIDS than babies who sleep on their backs.

### SAFE SLEEP FOR BABIES

- Always put babies on their backs to sleep, even for naps, for the first year.
- Use only cribs manufactured after September 1986.
- Crib mattresses should be firm and comforters, pillows and bumper pads should not be used.
- Never sleep on a sofa or chair with your baby.
- Keep baby's head uncovered while sleeping.
- Keep baby's environment smoke-free before and after birth.
- Tell everyone who cares for your baby how to keep your baby safe while sleeping.
- SIDS is the leading cause of death in infants between one month and one year of age.
- Most SIDS deaths happen between two and four months of age.

Source: Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.sidscanada.org  
1-800-363-7437  
www.caringforkids.cps.ca/babies/safesleepfortoby.htm  
www.fsid.org.uk

erational divide when doing home visits with new parents as part of the region's Healthy Baby, Healthy Children program. Some extended family members insisted tummy sleeping is safest.

Parents "get lots of conflicting advice," agrees Charlotte Etue, clinical nurse specialist in the childbirth and neonatal programs at Grand River Hospital.

Etue says the hospital places all newborns on their backs, except for those in the neonatal intensive care who are connected to monitors and must sleep on their tummies.

The latest evidence indicates the safest place for babies to sleep is in their own crib in their parents' room for at least the first six months.

The crib should be manufactured after September 1986 and be free of soft bedding and stuffed toys, which could impede air flow. Bumper pads should not be used because they pose a risk of strangulation and suffocation.

Adults should not share the same sleep surface as an infant. Bed-sharing or napping with a baby on a sofa or armchair is not considered safe, nor is placing infants on a couch or chair, since they can roll off or roll into crevices and suffocate.

# Safest place for babies to sleep is in their crib

► SIDS continued from C2

Infants should be protected from overheating. Just a warm sleeper and a light blanket will do.

Putting baby to bed with a soother, after breastfeeding also seems to protect against SIDS.

The region's health unit last fall adopted a Canadian Pediatric Society position statement on safe

sleeping environments for infants and children.

A June 2007 report from Ontario's chief coroner noted there were 21 sudden unexpected deaths of infants under the age of one in 2005 in the province. Eleven had been sleeping with an adult or sibling and 10 were in an unsafe sleeping environment, such as an adult bed, couch or crib with extra

bedding, pillows or toys.

As a result, a pediatric death review committee recommended that public health departments and other agencies continue to educate new parents on safe sleeping practices.

Public health provides the information at prenatal classes, pre-birth and post-birth clinics and during home visits. Information is

also supplied to midwives.

Experts say back sleeping does not raise the risk of choking.

Once baby starts to roll over, it's not necessary to flip them onto their backs. But they need supervised "tummy time" when awake to strengthen their neck muscles and prevent flat heads.

akelly@therecord.com