

## Safe Sleep Check

Young babies nap and sleep in many places. This safety check is a way to be confident that every sleep is as safe as possible for your baby.

### 1. From the very start, make your baby as strong as possible (less vulnerable)

- Smokefree in pregnancy?
- Born after 36 weeks?
- Weighed more than 2500 gm at birth?
- Breastfed?

**Essential:** More vulnerable babies need the extra protection of their very own 'baby bed' (a bed designed for babies) every time they sleep.

### 2. For every sleep, make it as easy as possible for your baby to breathe

- Placed for sleep face up (on the back)?
- Plenty of space around your baby's face?
- In a safe space (no chance of getting onto the tummy, under covers, near pillows or into gaps)?
- Breathes only smokefree air?

### 3. In every place your baby sleeps, make it as safe as possible

- Close by you (same room as you when you sleep)?
- In own 'baby bed' or own safe space?
- All possible hazards noticed and removed or avoided?
- A sober person with your baby if there is alcohol, drugs or partying?

*atawhaitia ahau i roto moemoea*  
from my earliest beginnings, pursue  
protection so that I may dream

## Tummy time

*Back for sleep,  
front for play,  
upright for cuddles  
and hugs.*



This will help **gravity** protect your baby's head shape.

## Summary

Sleeping **face up** (on the back) protects babies through a critical stage of development.

A **clear face** protects babies from suffocation.

A **smokefree** start to life makes babies strong.

## The SUDI evidence

Information about SUDI changes as more deaths are explained. Some findings from research are stronger than others. This leaflet is based on major findings agreed by researchers around the world, and is supported by the findings of coroners.

Main Reference:

Carpenter, R.G. et al. Lancet 2004;363:185-91.

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Child and  
Youth  
Mortality  
Review  
Committee



The Office of the  
Chief Coroner

New Zealand Government

[www.changeforourchildren.co.nz](http://www.changeforourchildren.co.nz)

# safe sleep ESSENTIALS



Every year, about 60 babies die suddenly in their sleep.

Most deaths are preventable.

Safe sleep means  
face up, face clear, smokefree  
every time and place a baby sleeps.

change  
FOR OUR  
children

Information on preventing SUDI (sudden unexpected death in infancy)

## Message to parents

Precious new baby? Advice from everyone? How do you decide what is essential and what is not? This leaflet offers you essential up-to-date information to help you keep your baby safe every time and every place they sleep.

## What is SUDI?

SUDI stands for sudden, unexpected death in infancy. Some SUDI deaths can be explained (e.g. asphyxia or suffocation). Others cannot be (e.g. SIDS or cot death). Most happen in the first six months of life when a baby is asleep.

## How does it happen?

Babies have a natural drive to breathe. This fails for SUDI babies. They stop breathing in their sleep. Their breathing may stop because of:

- things in their sleeping environment
- things that weaken a baby's drive to breathe.

## Who is at risk?

SUDI risk comes from a set of things that act together:

- Some babies have a weaker drive to breathe than others, e.g. due to smoking in pregnancy, a low birth weight, being born prematurely or being bottle fed or unwell.
- Some sleeping situations have more hazards than others, e.g. from pillows, unsafe positioning, people in the bed, loose covers, soft bedding or unsafe swaddling.

## All babies, all places, every sleep

All babies need protecting from SUDI, in all the places they may sleep, and every time they sleep.

# safe sleep = face up + face clear + smokefree

Sudden unexpected death is extremely rare for babies protected by this safety formula.

## Face up

Your baby was designed to sleep face up (on the back). Their drive to breathe works best in this position and their airway is also safer. A built-in alarm reminds them to breathe, and strong gag and swallow reflexes protect their airway if they spill.

## Face clear

Your baby was designed to sleep with a clear face. This helps them breathe freely and not get too hot. Your baby may fall asleep with their face clear, but will it stay clear? This will depend on how they lie, where they sleep, and how you make it safe.

## Smokefree

Your baby was designed to grow and develop smokefree. All smoking harms babies, especially in pregnancy. Smoking takes oxygen and weakens vital systems as babies develop, e.g. breathing. When born, such babies need extra protection.

## Other ways to protect your baby from SUDI

Your baby was also designed to need you **close by** (in the same room as you when you sleep), to be **breastfed** (this strengthens their drive to breathe), and to be **handled gently** (to protect their brain). This is essential care for all babies.



## Focus on the face

Sleeping babies need to breathe. Placing babies in unsafe sleeping positions, especially if also propped on pillows, swaddled or wrapped, is dangerous. They may suffocate.

## What can happen

Too many SUDI babies were placed for sleep on the tummy, or on the side (but rolled forward) or on the back (but propped on pillows). Sadly, many were then found pressed into pillows, underneath bedding, wedged into gaps, with covers over their heads and faces, or under people.