

Ask Dr. Sue your health and safety questions



# SIDS, Child Health Month, Health and Safety Standards

by Susan S. Aronson, MD

## Preventable SIDS Deaths Occur in Child Care

Too many infants are dying in child care from the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) — in part because child care providers still put babies to sleep on their tummies. This startling finding was reported in the July 1997 issue of *Pediatrics*. In the article, the researchers summarized their telephone survey of how child care centers put infants to sleep in Washington, DC and two nearby counties. They obtained responses from 131 of 137 licensed centers, or 96% of licensed centers that care for infants in the metropolitan area.

Publicity about the prevention of SIDS when infants sleep on their backs has been associated with a remarkable reduction in tummy positioning for infants and a precipitous drop in SIDS deaths. In 1992, over 70% of US parents put their infants to sleep on their tummies. By 1995, only 30% of parents put their infants to sleep prone.

However, in 1996, half the child care centers in the Washington metropolitan area reported that they did not know the current national recommendation that all infants be put to

sleep on their backs. Roughly the same proportion reported that they put at least some infants to sleep on their tummies. In 20% of the centers, the respondents said that all infants were put to sleep in this dangerous position.

This problem is not limited to the nation's capital. Two states have data showing that a disproportionately high percentage of SIDS deaths occur in child care facilities. The Minnesota SIDS Center reports that the percentage of SIDS deaths in organized child care may be as high as 35.4%. In California, over 40% of SIDS deaths occur in child care. These rates of SIDS deaths in child care are higher than expected. According to the US Census Bureau, only 17% of infants in the United States were in child care centers (8%) and family child care homes (9%) in 1993.

In the Washington study, even among those centers that reported they knew about the risk of tummy positioning for sleep, less than half practiced safe positioning. These centers said their reasons for using the dangerous tummy-sleeping position included child comfort, instructions from the child's parents, a mistaken belief that back sleeping is less important after three

months of age, and the common misperception that children are more likely to choke if they sleep on their backs.

SIDS is a devastating occurrence in a child care facility. The death of a child is a loss of enormous significance to the child's family, the staff, and the community. The legal and financial costs to the program can be ruinous. When at least half of SIDS deaths can be prevented by putting infants to sleep on their backs, why would child care providers ever do anything else?

## October is Child Health Month — Plan to Get Involved

Smoking prevention is the focus of Child Health Month for 1997. Early childhood educators can play a big role in this campaign by promoting smoke-free environments for children in child care and in children's homes.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has free Child Health Month resource packets which contain ideas for Child Health Month activities, camera-ready information with tips for parents, media materials, sample brochures, a product catalog, stickers that can be used in

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the campaign, and other resources. You can use these materials all year.

To order a free kit, contact the Child Health Month message phone at (800) 433-9016, extension 7134. Leave your name and complete mailing address, spelling unusual surnames, street names, or names of cities. You can also e-mail your request to [chm@aap.org](mailto:chm@aap.org).

If you want to talk with someone at the Academy about what you can do for Child Health Month, contact Laura Aird, who provides staff support for the Healthy Child Care America Campaign, at (800) 433-9016, or by e-mail to [laird@aap.org](mailto:laird@aap.org).

### **High Priority Standards Protect Children from Harm**

The publication called *Caring for Our Children, The National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs* includes 981 separate requirements to protect children in group care settings. Of these, 182 were selected by national experts as those most likely to be associated with death, disability, or serious disease. This subset of the standards have been published in a booklet called *Stepping Stones*, so named because compliance with the 182 standards is on the path to quality in child care.

To order a print copy of the full set of standards, *Caring for Our Children*, call the American Academy of Pediatrics at (800) 433-9016.

To order a print copy of *Stepping Stones*, call the National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health at (703) 356-1964.

The full text of both *Caring for Our Children* and *Stepping Stones* are on

the Internet web site of the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care. The text can be searched by key words to find all the standards related to a specific topic. Any part of the electronic versions can be downloaded and printed for use away from the computer. The web address for the National Resource Center is <http://nrc.uchsc.edu>. If you can't access the Internet from home or work, ask your local library to help you.

### **The 1992 National Health and Safety Standards Are Under Review**

Five years have passed since the first edition of *Caring for Our Children* was published. This key reference was the result of a cooperative project of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Public Health Association (APHA). Much of the current training and new print materials on health and safety in child care are based on the standards. Now a comprehensive review to identify and revise any obsolete standards is underway. The preparation of the second edition is projected to take two to three years.

Ten technical panels of national experts, child care providers, and regulators were involved in developing the first edition of the standards. The technical panels are reconvening to address the following areas: environmental quality, prevention and control of infectious diseases, injury prevention and control, general health, nutrition, prevention and management of child abuse, staff health, children with special needs, health concerns related to social environment and child development, and health and safety organization and administration. As with the first edition, the input of the ten technical panels will be integrated into chap-

ters that are as user-friendly as possible for the child care profession. Two pediatricians are the co-chairs of the project to revise the standards: Albert Chang, MD, MPH, FAAP (for the APHA) and Susan Aronson, MD, FAAP (for the AAP). The project is funded by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau under a cooperative agreement with the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care.

Everyone who has used the standards is asked to offer suggestions on ways to improve this tool. Send ideas for changes to National Standards Revision Project, c/o Ruth Neil, Ph.D., RN, Project Coordinator, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, University of Colorado, 4200 East Ninth Avenue, Box C287, Denver, CO 80262.

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