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Summit County Public Health, Full Term First Birthday, and the Summit County Medical Examiner Urges Parents and Guardians to Follow Safe Sleep Tips for Infants

(Akron, Ohio,) July 29, 2020 - Too many babies in our community are dying due to unsafe sleeping practices. Sleep-related infant deaths occur in infants under the age of one. The risk of sleep-related death increases with co-sleeping or bed-sharing with adults and/or other family members, and unsafe sleep environments such as an adult bed or sofa (recliners), with pillows or blankets, and even stuffed animals, according to the Summit County Medical Examiner Office. These deaths include Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and deaths from accidental suffocation and asphyxia.

In Ohio, approximately three (3) infants die every week due to unsafe sleep environments. In 2019, Summit County started to see an increase of sleep-related deaths and these numbers are continuing to persist in 2020, particularly in the African American communities. "Unintentional asphyxiation (suffocation) accounts for almost 50% of the sleep-related deaths seen in Summit County since 2013, and African American Summit County residents are at more than twice the risk of having a sleep-related infant loss compared to white Summit County residents," said Ndid Edeh-Larberg, Maternal Child Health Epidemiologist at Summit County Public Health. Since 2013, we have lost an average of 10 infants a year due to unsafe sleeping practices and even one infant death due to unsafe sleep is too many."

"Caring for a newborn can be truly exhausting, especially for parents who face other stress factors in their daily lives. But, falling asleep with your child, without placing them in a safe sleep environment, cannot become an acceptable routine," said Tamiyka Rose, the City of Akron Health Equity Ambassador and Assistant to Mayor Horrigan for Public Policy. "Losing a child is unthinkable; losing a child and knowing that it could have been prevented is life-altering."

Follow these tips and visit [SafeSleep.Ohio.gov](https://www.SafeSleep.Ohio.gov) to get additional tips on how to protect your family from an infant loss:

- The safest place for your baby to sleep is in the room where you sleep, but not in your bed.
- Never place babies to sleep on adult beds, chairs, sofas, recliners, waterbeds, pillows, cushions, or soft surfaces.
- Dress your baby in sleep clothing, such as a sleep sack, and do not use a blanket.
- Avoid letting the baby get too hot. Keep room temperatures in a range comfortable for a lightly clothed adult.
- Infants should receive all recommended vaccinations.
- Breastfeeding is recommended to help to reduce the risk of SIDS.
- Avoid smoke exposure during pregnancy and after birth. Place the crib in an area that is always smoke-free.

- Supervised, awake tummy time is recommended daily to facilitate development.
- Consider using a pacifier at nap time and bedtime, once breastfeeding is well established.
- Talk to those who care for your baby, including child care providers, family, and friends, about placing your baby to sleep on their back for every sleep.
- Obtain regular prenatal care to reduce the risk of SIDS even before birth.
- Avoid alcohol and illicit drug use during pregnancy and after birth.

“Babies in our community are dying and they are our future. Protect our community by helping babies sleep safely,” said Shaleeta Smith, Manager Maternal Child Health at Summit County Public Health.

“Sleep-related deaths are not an abstract concept – these irreversible tragedies occur far too often in our city,” Mayor Dan Horrigan added. “We need everyone who loves or cares for an infant to take this issue seriously and commit to practicing safe sleep, so every one of our babies has a fighting chance to reach their first birthday and beyond.”

For more information and/or resources on safe sleep practices please contact your local healthcare provider. If you currently do not have a safe place for your infant to sleep please contact Summit County Public Health at 330-926-5700.