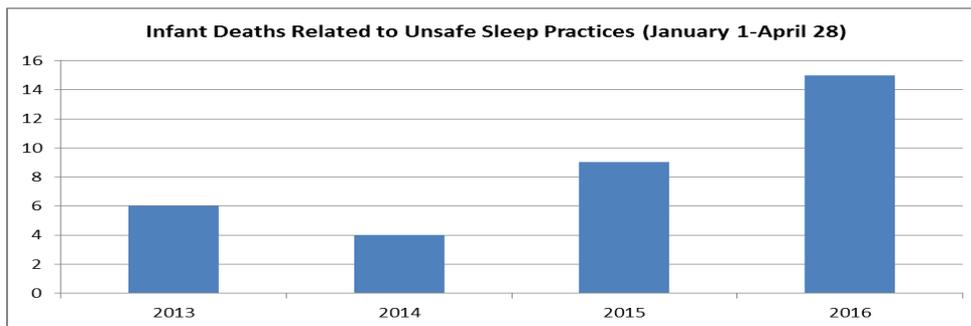


May 2, 2016

Alert – Infant Deaths Increase due to Unsafe Sleep Practices

This is a general reminder to ensure that safe sleep practices are discussed with all expectant parents and parents/caregivers with young infants.

The BC Coroners Service Child Death Review Unit has identified an increase in infant deaths related to unsafe sleep practices. Over the past three years there has been an average of 18 sleep related deaths per year. This year, in just under four months (between January 1 and April 28, 2016), 15 infants have died. Almost all were younger than six months of age.



BC Coroners Service

Coroner investigations identified that many of these infants died due to:

- suffocation when placed prone on soft blankets or mattresses,
- an overlay by a parent (sleeping together on a bed or couch), or
- suffocation due to head covering by a blanket.

We encourage all health care providers and those working with families to ask parents about their baby's sleeping environment and support them to develop a safe sleep plan. This is of particular importance with preterm or medically fragile infants as the risk of infant mortality is increased. Consider the following in discussion with parents/caregivers:

- Socioeconomic and cultural factors
- The possibility of more than one sleep environment /caregiver for the baby
- The need for parents/caregivers to be supported to have a plan in advance to prevent an accidental unsafe sleep environment that can happen when fatigue, sedation or impairment are present
- The provision of contacts/resources for more information about safe sleep or to discuss safe sleep planning

To help reduce the risk of infant death during sleep:

- Always place the baby on his or her back to sleep at naptime and nighttime
- Provide the baby with a safe sleep environment that has a firm surface and no pillows, comforters, or quilts
- Place the baby to sleep in a crib, cradle or bassinet next to your bed
- Provide a smoke-free environment

Resources:

- Perinatal Services BC Safe Sleep Environment Guideline for Infants 0 to 12 Months of Age
www.perinataleservicesbc.ca/Documents/Guidelines-Standards/HealthPromotion/SafeSleepGuideline.pdf
- Honoring Our Babies: Safe Sleep Toolkit
<http://www.perinataleservicesbc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/aboriginal-resources/safe-sleep-toolkit>
- Healthy Families BC - Safe Sleeping Article
<https://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/safe-sleeping>