

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is part of a larger category of unexpected (as opposed to unexplained) infant deaths also called SUID (sudden unexpected infant death). Babies who die suddenly but whose causes of death are later determined as - infection, brain abnormality, cardiac dysfunction and more, for instance - also fall into this SUID category.

The syndrome is mysterious, since by its very definition the cause cannot be determined. Although some 2,300 babies in the United States die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome each year, and SUID is the leading cause of death for children one month to one year, some babies are more at risk than others. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is more likely to affect a baby who is between 1 and 4 months old, it is more common in boys than girls, and most deaths occur during the fall, winter and early spring months.

While the cause of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is unknown, many clinicians and researchers believe it is associated with problems in the ability of the baby to arouse from sleep, possibly because of an inability to detect low levels of oxygen or because of a carbon dioxide buildup in the blood. When babies sleep face down, they may re-breathe exhaled carbon dioxide. Normally, rising carbon dioxide levels activate nerve cells in the brainstem, which stimulate the brain's respiratory and arousal centers. The baby then wakes up, turns his or her head and breathes faster to get more oxygen. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome babies, however, may fail to rouse.



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