

**Commentary Review ~ Recent Study Shows Increased Suffocation Deaths
by Dr. Thomas G. Keens
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This commentary written by Dr. Thomas G. Keens is in response to the research article, recently highlighted in the news, about the increase of infant death rates from accidental suffocation and strangulation during sleep. The reference is: Carrie K. Shapiro-Mendoza, Melissa Kimball, Kay M. Tomashek, Robert N. Anderson and Sarah Blanding. *US Infant Mortality Trends Attributable to Accidental Suffocation and Strangulation in Bed From 1984 Through 2004: Are Rates Increasing?* Pediatrics 2009;123; 533-539.

A study from the *Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP)*, published in *Pediatrics* this month (February, 2009), shows that infant death rates from accidental suffocation and strangulation during sleep have increased four-fold from 1984 to 2004, with most of the increase occurring from 1996-2004 (14% increase in these deaths per year). At the same time, total sudden unexpected infant deaths fell 42% and SIDS deaths fell 62%. Of the infants who died from accidental suffocation or strangulation, the specific mechanism was believed to be overlaying in 34%, wedging or entrapment 14%, and suffocation by bedding in 14%. 51% of these infants were bedsharing at the time of death, 6% of these infants were not bedsharing, but the bedsharing status was unknown in 43%.

This study underscores the importance of the infant sleeping environment, and the fact that an unsafe sleeping environment can cause death. This study does not *specifically* target bedsharing. However, 51% (perhaps even more) of those infants who died from accidental suffocation or strangulation were bedsharing at the time of death, and 34% of these deaths were believed to be due to overlaying. When you combine this information with the observation that adult beds are often unsafe (soft mattress, pillows, duvets, etc.), avoiding unsafe bedsharing is certainly an important message based on these study results. One of the dangers of bedsharing is the associated unsafe sleeping environment, and thus the simplest public health advice remains encouraging room sharing, but not bedsharing.

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