
Make every sleep a safe sleep for precious pēpi this winter

As the days get shorter and the nights get cooler, Whānau Āwhina Plunket and the National SUDI Prevention Coordination Service are reminding whānau to make every sleep a safe sleep for precious pēpi this winter.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket Acting Chief Nurse Karen Magrath says sudden unexpected death of an infant (SUDI) is a leading cause of death for pēpi in Aotearoa New Zealand, but safe sleep practices can prevent many of these sad events.

“Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurses, health workers and kaiāwhina provide safe sleep advice tailored to the unique needs of whānau. This is done in a way that is mana-enhancing and non-judgmental, and takes into account whānau strengths, wishes, beliefs, practices and pēpi developmental stage.”

Ms Magrath says there are ways to keep pēpi safe as the cooler months approach.

“Use more clothing layers on your pēpi in cooler weather, rather than adding more layers of bedding. And make sure any blankets you use are lightweight, made of natural fibres, the right size for baby’s bed, and securely tucked in under the mattress,” Ms Magrath says.

“Baby sleeping bags or sleep sacks are popular – but it’s important to make sure these are good quality, the right size for baby, have fitted neck and arm holes or sleeves, and a dome or zip fastening, so there’s no danger of pēpi slipping inside a bag that’s too big.”

Other ways to keep pēpi safe in bed are:

- place your pēpi near the foot of their bed to stop them slipping down under the covers
- keep your baby’s room well-aired with the door open, especially if you use a heater
- keep your baby’s room warm but not too hot – it should feel comfy for a lightly-clothed adult
- check your pēpi is warm enough by putting two fingers on the top of their back. If their back is warm, then they’re warm enough. If their back is hot or sticky, take off a layer or some covers.

Ms Magrath adds that parents and caregivers who choose to share their bed with their baby should always put their baby in their own separate sleep space beside them.

“If you like to keep your pēpi close while you’re both sleeping, always use a wahakura or Pēpi-Pod,” Ms Magrath says. “These are designed so you can share a bed with your pēpi, while keeping them in their own separate space and safe from accidental suffocation.”

Fay Selby-Law, General Manager of the National SUDI Prevention Coordination Service, says although SUDI rates have reduced significantly, they have not fallen equitably across the whole population.



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“Māori babies around seven times more likely and Pasifika babies nearly four times more likely to die from SUDI,” says Ms Selby-Law.

Ms Selby-Law says the National SUDI Prevention Coordination Service is committed to ensuring all newborn pēpi have a safe sleep environment.

“By ensuring wahakura are readily available to any whānau with a newborn, we are actively helping to promote excellent safe sleeping habits,” she says.

“The pandemic has highlighted the many inequities and cultural barriers within the healthcare system – and the lack of access to wahakura for all whānau is one of these barriers.

“The National SUDI Prevention Coordination Service is committed to breaking down all barriers and ensuring all whānau have access to wahakura as soon as they need it.”

Ms Selby-Law says ensuring every baby has a safe sleep, every time they sleep, will dramatically reduce the number of SUDI cases in Aotearoa.

“SUDI still affects around 40 to 50 pēpi in Aotearoa New Zealand each year. This is an absolute tragedy and my heart goes out to anyone who has lost their precious pēpi this way.”

Anyone who needs a baby bed can ask their Whānau Āwhina Plunket nurse, Well Child Tamariki Ora provider, midwife or doctor for help to get one.

For more on safe sleeping, visit <https://www.plunket.org.nz/caring-for-your-child/safe-sleep/>

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